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Disclaimer: It's JKR's not mine. It's J.K. Rowling's stable of characters, settings, and ideas; not mine. I've never profited from my writings and frankly never plan to.

A/N: This is being reposted slowly when I find the time.

It had been a bad first year back from oblivion for the dark wizard known as Lord Voldemort. Every single thing he had tried to accomplish had failed, and in the process his army of deatheaters took very heavy hits.

The hits culminated with the death of his biggest benefactor and supporter Lucius Malfoy. Voldemort was certain it was that pesky Potter spawn that had been the one to kill the closest thing to a friend he had in his ranks. Voldemort knew one thing for certain; he would welcome Draco into his ranks and give him the task of finding a way into Hogwarts especially after word of the deatheater ward had reached his ears. If young Malfoy succeeded in his task he would become his right hand.

Thoughts of young Malfoy aside, Voldemort needed to bring some fresh blood into his ranks and he would have to leave the United Kingdom to do it. With that in mind, England was due for the quietest summer it would know until the end of the war. The rest of the continent however, would get a first hand glimpse at the malicious greatness known as Voldemort.

Meanwhile in London, Harry Potter and Hermione Granger were in the midst of a team duel against Remus Lupin and Nymphadora Tonks. Due to their overwhelming advantage in power they had agreed to only use basic charms and defense spells in the duel.

Hermione ducked a canary colored beam shot from Tonks before she raised her wand and said, "Wingardium Leviosa" and watched as Tonks floated up into the air before Hermione began to flick her wand shaking and rattling the auror repeatedly.

Remus stepped in silently cast a spell which was forest green in color directly at Hermione. Harry smirked and waved his wand as a chair intercepted the curse before he repeated the same procedure that Hermione had on the werewolf in front of him. After a few

minutes Remus and Tonks conceded the duel and were gently placed down on the mat, slightly frazzled but ultimately no worse for the wear.

After Dobby supplied each of them with glasses of cold water Remus finally said, "You do realize that this means I won't duel either of you any more. I'm afraid my fragile ego can't take being taken down by the levitation charm again."

Harry chuckled and said, "We could have transfigured you into match instead."

Remus paled slightly and after another long drink of his water said, "No I think levitating was quite fine."

Harry and Hermione laughed as they stood up and went to their respective rooms to clean up before dinner. When they reached the dining room they found that an impromptu order meeting appeared to be in the making for the evening. Dumbledore, Moody and the still grieving Arthur and Molly Weasley were talking animatedly about something with the "adults" of the house.

Harry and Hermione shared a slightly bemused look before taking their seats and serving themselves from the food on the table. If the others at the table were aware of their presence they didn't show it as Harry and Hermione discussed their first vacation of the summer and getting their first full opportunity to ride the bike Sirius had gotten them legally thanks in large part to passing the muggle.

Harry finished chewing on the piece of ham he had been eating and after a swig of milk asked Hermione, "So do you want to switch on and off, when we drive up to Sirius' cabin?"

Hermione smiled and said, "Actually I was thinking you could drive both ways, and if you got tired then and only then I would drive."

Harry arched his eyebrow and asked, "Why is that?"

Hermione bit her lip and then cheekily asked, "Well I can't rightfully check your bum when I'm driving now, can I?"

Harry chuckled but then seriously asked, "Honestly Love, why is it that you don't want to drive?"

Hermione sighed and then meekly said, "It's like riding a broom I suppose. I can do it if I need to, but I'd prefer not to if given a choice."

Harry leaned over to Hermione putting his forehead on hers and he murmured, "That's fine, but you should never be ashamed because you're afraid or unsure of yourself. Remember we're a team, you do the heavy thinking, and I'll do the heavy lifting."

Hermione giggled and gave Harry a peck on the lips before she said, "I love you Harry."

Harry smiled and replied, "Love you too Hermworm, now let's finish our meal and find out what the old fogies are talking about." Hermione nodded and gave Harry a fond smile before continuing their meal.

As the meal continued, the adults slowly began to stop speaking before Dumbledore finally addressed his two prized pupils, "Harry, Hermione we didn't intend on removing you from the discussion we were just having. We were merely discussing our summer plans and the training that I will be offering you."

Harry softly asked, "Have you found those pair of glasses we told you about Sir?"

Dumbledore shook his head and replied, "No, but I have made great progress. I believe that soon I will have completed the necessary work. I believe the retrieval of the glasses will be an excellent training exercise later this summer."

Harry and Hermione nodded before she asked, "So what summer plans were you discussing?"

Elizabeth decided to answer the query, "We were discussing what security needs we were going to have during the trip. Your headmaster believes that the two of you will be sufficient to ensure our safety. Do the two of you agree?"

Harry and Hermione shared a look before Hermione answered, "I believe that if you are on vacation with us mum and dad, then you'll

be safer then if the rest of the order save the headmaster was doing it instead."

David and Elizabeth shared a brief look before they nodded and David stiffly said, "It's about bloody time too. I'm beginning to get a little stir crazy without our practice to work at."

Harry frowned and mumbled down at his plate, "Sorry about that."

Elizabeth made a tutting noise and said, "Nonsense Harry, you're no more at fault for this than anyone else in the room. We'll be going back into practice after this business with Voldemort is dealt with. But, you have to promise to give us a few grandchildren to spoil by the time we retire."

Harry and Hermione glanced at each other out of the corner of their eyes blushing furiously although Hermione had a playful smirk on her face. David glanced at the teens and said, "Ok Liz I think you've embarrassed them enough for now." Elizabeth smirked wickedly before she grabbed her husband's hand and they excused themselves.

Meanwhile across London in a small flat a red haired witch is cleaning up said flat without the aid of magic for the first time. After a full day of looking for employment she finally found a job as a waitress at a small muggle restaurant a few blocks away from the ministry building.

Ginny sighed as she finished the few dishes her brother Percy had left her, and said to no one in particular, "Welcome to your new life Gin."

At the now unplottable location of Malfoy Manor a young man with slicked back blonde hair was working in his familial training room with only one thought on his mind, revenge. The pale youth dove underneath the wood projectile and with a fluid movement previously unexpected from the young man; he sprung into an offensive posture as he trained his wand at the dummy's head and cast a silent blasting hex. As he landed the spray of exploded wood landed on his robes and with a casual flick of his wrist he dusted off his shoulders before he said in a pained whisper, "Potter."

However, every play has its players and those previously mentioned had bit roles, especially compared to the individual who was having a clandestine meeting that could have a very large impact on not only those present, but many others as well.

In the back of a shop in Knockturn Alley an old but regal looking wizard was waiting for a person who could be the connection he needed to bring about a sorely needed change in Harry Potter and who he trusted.

The old wizard watched as a cloaked figure entered the back room and strode over to his table before taking a seat. The old wizard smiled and said, "I must admit, I am very pleased that you decided to come and make up your own mind on this matter." The cloaked figure merely nodded and the old wizard pulled out a short but elegant looking wand as he flicked it a few times bringing up some very powerful privacy charms in the process.

The old man looked off into the distance for a moment before he asked, "I take it you know about the Knights of Walpurgis?" The figure nodded and the old man continued, "Everything you think you know about the knights is a complete and utter lie." The old man smiled slightly as the figure squeezed the table tightly as though they were waiting for elaboration.

The old man stroked his beard for a moment before he said, "History has recorded the Knights of Walpurgis as the followers of Octavius Grindewald. However, the truth of the matter is that Grindewald named his followers after the Knights because they had long been synonymous with great power and working in the shadows. I believe it was the muggle prime minister of the time who said 'History will be kind to me for I intend to write it.' The knights have refused to write history because we prefer to remain in the shadows. Therefore others have interpreted our role in history and we have been left with an unflattering reputation."

The cloaked figure spoke deeply, and it was apparent that they were using a voice changing spell before they asked, "What does this have to do with Harry?"

The old man nodded and said, "Mr. Potter has a destiny far greater than even he would have been led to believe. There are numerous prophecies made about the great impact he will have on the magical

world." Upon seeing the cloaked figure flinch slightly he continued with a hint of mirth, "Surely you didn't think the little trip that Mr. Potter made to the ministry wouldn't go unnoticed in many quarters, did you?"

The old man laughed, "The knights' influence goes far deeper than you would ever suspect young one. Our group does not wish to be in power, but we do wish to mold the leaders of the future so that they can not be manipulated like the politicians of the present. Fudge was a complete and utter embarrassment and he solely is to blame for the plight that Britain currently finds itself in. Potter and his mate have a rare opportunity to make the world a far better place than the one they entered. Not only do they have great power, but they have the strong wills necessary to effect great change in the face of adversity."

The cloaked figure nodded and asked, "I understand what you speak of, but what can I do?"

The old man nodded and replied, "All that we ask is that you offer the option of our counsel to Mr. Potter without actually telling him of our existence. Albus Dumbledore is a great man and wizard but he fails to use his power to truly help the people that he has pledged to serve. The age of purebloods and blood importance is rapidly coming to an end, and Potter and his mate are the only ones who can bring about the end without bloodshed. Think hard on what I've said and let your conscience lead you." The cloaked figure nodded slowly and stood to leave. The old man waved his wand canceling all of his previous spells before watching the figure's retreating back praying for their success.

The days flew by at Black Manor as the extent of Harry and Hermione's practice was something Hermione called, "Self study". Basically meaning, that Harry and Hermione were developing new and specialized spells to deal with Voldemort and his followers and they were the only ones who knew what they were doing.

In fact several nights have ended as they cuddled together and fell asleep on the couch in the library, content with sleeping in each other's presence. The adults of the house immediately cottoned on to the slight shift in Harry and Hermione's relationship and two adults in particular thought it was time for a rather personal chat.

Whether it was a quirk of ironic fate or simply because the two teens were leaving the next day on a trip with limited adult supervision, Harry and Hermione were each pulled from the breakfast table to be given a talk on adult level intimacy.

Sirius pulled Harry downstairs into the male room and ushered Harry to a seat before he said, "Harry, I think we need to have a talk about the final step in intimacy in a relationship."

Harry arched his eyebrow and smirked slightly before he motioned for Sirius to continue, "The thing is Harry, that physical intimacy is different for witches and wizards."

Now Sirius had his attention and Harry asked, "What do you mean?"

Sirius ran his hands through his hair nervously before he said, "In a relationship between magical people when they have sex there is a power exchange. I assume you understand the physical aspects and responsibilities that you undertake as the man in the relationship, correct?"

Harry nodded slowly and Sirius smiled in relief before he asked, "Good, is there anything else you'd like to know?"

Harry frowned and asked, "Who did my dad go to when he needed to talk about this kind of stuff?"

Sirius chuckled and said, "Your father was a very complex man. Your mother actually was the only woman he ever slept with, although he had the reputation of a womanizer before he settled down. He may have been a champion snogger before your mother finally took pity on him but he wouldn't do more than that. I was James' confidant on matter of the flesh. Remus was his confidant on matters of the heart."

Harry was silent for a few minutes savoring this new piece of his father, as though it was completing another part of puzzle that might never be completed. Sirius misunderstood Harry's silence as meaning he was upset and said, "I didn't mean to upset you Harry, it's just that your father and I were close and I thought you might like to know about him and... "

Harry cut in slightly amused, "You didn't upset me Sirius, I was just thinking about what you said."

Sirius released a sigh of relief and asked, "Did you have any other questions?"

Harry frowned and asked, "Is there anything special I should do if it's her first time?"

Sirius nodded and said, "Yes, you need to be gentle and supportive with her Harry. I know it's your first time too, but try to think of it as a marathon and not a sprint. Blokes take less time to finish their business and I imagine it'd be a lot more special if you both finish."

Harry arched his eyebrow and with a slight grimace said, "That was a bit um awkward Paddy."

Sirius chuckled and said, "Never ask a question unless you want an answer."

Harry chuckled and said, "Yeah I suppose you're right. So, are we still leaving tomorrow morning bright and early?"

Sirius smiled and replied, "Yeah kiddo, we hit the road at 6. With any luck we'll be there by noon." Harry nodded as Sirius left the room looking far more relieved than he had seen him since the hospital wing.

Meanwhile up in the library Elizabeth and Hermione were discussing how the other half lives. Elizabeth had consulted several books and the witches of the house, to find the best way to broach the subject to her daughter.

Hermione had a suspicion what her mother wanted to discuss and she asked, "Mum what did you want to talk about?"

Elizabeth looked her daughter directly in the eyes and said, "We need to talk about sex honey."

Despite the fact that Hermione knew what her mother wanted to talk about, having it so blatantly stated still caused the young witch to blush furiously. Elizabeth taking this to mean that the topic was new

to her daughter said, "I know we've had this talk before, but now I'm afraid that you might need a refresher sweetie."

Hermione still slightly off balance only protested weakly, "Mum, this isn't necessary."

Elizabeth waved off her protests and continued on, "I've talked to Emmeline and Tonks and they've informed me that there is a difference between how your father and I do things, and how you and Harry, for instance, might do things."

Hermione, beyond the point of complete mortification gaped as her mother manufactured some very detailed drawings. Elizabeth began her lecture, "According to Emmeline a witch and a wizard physically couple the same way that us non magical folk do." Hermione sunk down further into her chair hoping for an escape.

Elizabeth far too immersed in her lecture to notice her daughter's discomfort continued, "As you can see on this diagram here there is a substantial magical discharge when a witch or wizard make love. The mechanics of the act are completely the same aside from the previously mentioned magical discharge upon climax."

Hermione muttered under her breath, "Oh dear Merlin, please strike me down now."

Elizabeth eyed her daughter expectantly apparently quite pleased with her presentation and asked, "Do you have any questions?"

Hermione let out a relieved breath before she replied, "Not really mum. I've done my own research on this after we had our talk before third year."

Elizabeth put her diagram back into its original pile and with a smirk asked, "What kind of research are we talking about sweetie?"

Hermione blushed and said, "I've read some books on the magic of sex, and also some other books." Hermione finished with a mumble as she grew even redder.

Elizabeth like a shark in the water asked, "It wouldn't happen to include the Karma Sutra would it?"

Hermione frowned slightly and mumbled, "Maybe."

Elizabeth laughed as she squeezed her daughter's shoulders tightly and said, "You really do love Harry don't you?"

Hermione could only nod and Elizabeth said in a warm tone, "You know I don't think I've ever really seen you two argue. Have you actually had a fight before?"

Hermione nodded and said, "Yes we had two bad ones this year actually. Of course, both of them were my fault too. It just got so crazy at the end of the year, and I lost it a little bit."

Elizabeth nodded understandingly and said, "So are those the only arguments you two have ever had?"

Hermione bit her lip and shook her head in the negative, before she softly answered, "The worst argument had to be our third year about the firebolt."

Elizabeth nodded understandingly and said, "Oh I thought your heart had been broken irrevocably when we received your letter telling us Harry had reacted. Knowing now that he never received any presents before, well I can understand why he was upset, although agreeing with that Ronald character was a tad disappointing."

Hermione sniffed slightly at the mention of Ron but simply said, "Yes I think we both could have handled that situation better, but in my defense, I had no idea that his relatives were really that bad. Even now Harry slips up about some of the things those people did to him when he lived there. I know he says he is over it, but after Voldemort is gone I think I'll have to give them a visit and give them a private lesson in transfiguration."

Elizabeth shook her head and asked, "While that may be, what was so bad about that argument compared to the others? You admitted that you've had arguments with him before, so why was it worse then?"

Hermione sighed and said, "It was a combination of things I suppose. I did go behind his back and turn in his broom, and well he was just acting like a boy I guess. He certainly had no reason to trust that I had his best interests at heart considering how he was raised, and I

guess a combination of those factors came to a head. For awhile I was certain he wouldn't forgive me."

Elizabeth nodded and then asked, "So then how did it come about when he finally forgave you?"

Hermione sighed, "It didn't actually happen until he got the firebolt back unfortunately. I knew then that Quidditch meant everything to him and I should have taken a better tact dealing with the broom. But, I was so certain he would dismiss my suggestion to get it checked that I just had to do it. Better he was alive and mad at me than dead."

Elizabeth nodded and said, "So he just needed to grow up some first dear, it's not like he was the first man to need that."

Hermione giggled and said, "You're right mum, and grown up he has."

Just as Hermione finished her statement a wild eyed and panting Harry came in and blurted, "They found Neville's Mum and Dad, and they're still alive. They were in a secret room at Malfoy Manor, the house elves had been taking care of them."

Hermione frowned and asked, "How did they get into Malfoy Manor? I doubt Draco would have let them in."

Harry shrugged and said, "Remus told me that Narcissa and Draco were long gone when they got there."

Hermione sighed and asked, "I assumed Malfoy Manor would have been unplottable, so how did they find it?"

Harry smirked slightly and replied, "We were sitting in the drawing room when Dobby popped in and told us that another elf visited him and told him about it."

Hermione frowned and asked, "How did an elf get into the house here?"

Harry smiled and cheekily replied, "Why is there something Hermione Granger, defender of elves, doesn't know about her little friends?"

Hermione huffed and punched Harry in the arm before he continued, "Ok, ok the truth is that elves can go to unplottable places. They can apparate to other elves and their masters as opposed to apparating to a place."

Hermione nodded and then asked, "How did anyone get into Malfoy Manor then?"

Harry smiled and replied, "Apparently if a house is willingly abandoned, then anyone can enter the wards. The house is still unplottable but Dobby went and got Neville's parents and took them to Hogwarts. Madam Pomfrey seems to think they are going to be fine, or at least as fine as they can be."

Hermione sighed and nodded as Elizabeth left the room to the completely oblivious couple. Hermione leaned her head on Harry's shoulder and he ran his hands through her hair as they sat contemplating the events of the day. After a few minutes Harry said, "Did you get the talk too?"

Hermione groaned and replied, "Oh sweet Merlin I doubt I've ever been as mortified as I was when my mum broke out the diagrams."

Harry chuckled and said, "Sirius talked to be about the next step in intimacy. I swear to Merlin he must have practiced his little speech for days."

Hermione giggled and said, "If it makes you feel any better, my mum appeared to be well rehearsed also."

Harry nodded and a few more minutes of silence passed before he asked, "Do you think I should tell Neville about the experimental potion Snape made?"

Hermione bit her lip and then replied, "I suppose you should give him the option Love."

Harry nodded and then asked, "Did you and your mum discuss anything else?"

Hermione quietly replied, "We talked about third year and our argument over the firebolt."

Harry softly said, "You know I must admit that wasn't one of my finer moments."

Hermione sniffed and asked, "Why did you act like that?"

Harry ran his hand not stroking Hermione's hair through his own disheveled locks before he said, "It wasn't the gift as much as how it made me feel. For once I felt special, like someone truly cared about me for me."

Hermione softly protested, "Harry I did care about you like that. In fact, it's the only reason I did it."

Harry smiled slightly and replied, "I know that now Hermione. But, back then all I could feel was hurt because I thought you were trying to deny me the thing that I wasn't aware you were already giving me."

Hermione nodded into Harry's shoulder and softly said, "I understand now." After a moment she said, "I think you should send an owl to Neville today and tell him about the potion. This way he'll have some time to think about it and make a decision."

Harry nodded before he pulled away from Hermione slightly and asked with a crooked smile, "So ready to go on a trip?"

Hermione smiled sweetly and said, "Only if you're driving."

Harry smiled and replied, "I wouldn't have it any other way."

A/N: Slow start to the story to ease everyone back in. There has been quite a change in things since fate has stepped in, hasn't there? Keep an eye on the Ginny and Draco story lines; they'll be more important than they look towards the happenings at Hogwarts for the coming year. Next chapter we have a bit of a road trip and some updates on Voldemort's mayhem in Europe. Figure next weekend for the next update so I hope this one tides you over. Please review and as always thanks for reading.

Disclaimer: You ever really wish that you owned Harry Potter and accordingly were rich and famous? Yes me too, but alas JKR owns it and not me.

A.N: Once again this is a repost of the earlier version, although starting around chapter 10 you'll see some changes to the plot.

Harry had to admit that a six hour drive on a motorcycle was something one should work their way up to as opposed to doing so for his first trip. In fact, if not for the amusement he derived from watching Hermione's ponytail flap out the back of her helmet it most likely would have been a very miserable trip. After a short stop just outside of Blackpool, the assorted group enjoyed a late breakfast at a roadside diner before hopping back on the M6 to begin the rest of the trip.

During their breakfast Harry asked, "So what exactly are we doing while we're here?"

Sirius smiled and replied, "Well, actually we thought we might take a portkey to Dublin for a couple of days by the weekend. But aside from that, relaxation and maybe try a spot of fishing. There are some nice restaurants in Stanraer that you can take Hermione to if you get that bored. But, seeing as how this is a muggle property no house elves, so we cook for ourselves."

Harry smiled at Hermione and said, "I think we'll manage just fine. I mean all those years with the Dursleys have to be good for something." Harry was surprised to feel none of the former bitterness he normally did. Hermione noticed and gave Harry an understanding wink as she finished the remainder of her breakfast.

The remainder of the trip went by quickly as one last stop for petrol was made before they crossed the border into Scotland, and eventually pulled into the small drive for Sirius' cottage. Of course, saying the house was a cottage would be like calling Hogwarts a big building. Simply stated, it would be an extreme understatement. The cottage, as Sirius called it, was actually a two story beach house that had plenty of room in it to wander around and still maintain a level of privacy from the other inhabitants of the room. If anything Harry was slowly beginning to learn that Sirius was the master of understatement.

As Harry dismounted the bike he realized just how tired and sore he actually was. Granted having the sidecar did take some stress off of his body, but he still was sore from having to use some very specific muscles that he hadn't used recently if ever. Hermione caught Harry's wince when he stepped off of the bike and with a concerned expression on her face asked, "Are you ok Harry?"

Harry smiled slightly and replied, "I'm fine, just a little sore is all."

Sirius chuckled and said, "Good thing we have a hot tub then kiddo. You and Hermione are more than welcome to try it out if you want to."

Harry waggled his eyebrows at Hermione, and she blushed slightly before she punched him in the shoulder and said, "Well let's go then, I have to change into my swimsuit if we're going to get into the hot tub."

Harry gingerly made his way into the house carrying their luggage that had been shrunk and walked up the stairs to find a bedroom to his liking. Hermione grabbed her luggage and enlarged it before taking the room across the hall from Harry's and shutting her door behind her. Harry slowly changed into a pair of swim trunks and grabbed a pair of towels from the bathroom down the hall before he encountered Hermione in a conservative but attractive bikini. Harry handed her a towel as well before they walked back down the stairs and out towards the room with the hot tub in it.

Hermione climbed in and covered a snicker as Harry slowly and gingerly made his way in as well. The look of pure bliss on Harry's face after he sunk himself into the water, which was enough to make Hermione giggle and Harry to crack open one eye and groan in response.

Hermione finally stifled her giggles and softly asked, "Does it really hurt that much?"

Harry shook his head as he maneuvered himself nearer to one of the jets underwater to massage his lower back. He finally said, "It doesn't hurt, I'm just really sore. It felt like how I feel after a long fly on my broom, but multiply that by three."

Hermione sighed and said, "Scoot over then, I'll rub your back."

Harry slowly slid away from the edge of the hot tub as Hermione sidled in behind him and wrapped her legs around him to hold him in place. Hermione's small and soft hands worked their magic on Harry's back and he felt the requisite reaction to being rubbed down by his attractive girlfriend in a bikini. Upon seeing Harry squirm in an attempt to stifle his reaction Hermione giggled and said, "You know, I think I can do something to help you with that."

Harry coughed and promptly slid underneath the water in shock. Hermione laughed even harder when Harry resurfaced with a completely bewildered expression on his face. Hermione leaned in and gave him a kiss before she throatily said, "Now about that problem." Nearly an hour later the thoroughly stimulated and satiated pair dried each other off before walking back into the house with a little extra bounce in their steps.

Sirius and Emmeline caught the grin and glow about the pair and Sirius asked, "Anything we should know about what happened in the hot tub?"

Harry shrugged and replied with a twinkle in his eye, "Hermione rubbed my back and I returned the favor." Sirius rolled his eyes but refrained from speaking further as Emmeline pulled him into a steamy kiss allowing the teens to escape and wash up before heading into town for a nice dinner.

Harry dressed up into a pair of khaki shorts and a short sleeved white button up shirt, which incidentally had a small lightning bolt, the new Potter family symbol, on the breast. Hermione came down where a nice blouse and skirt outfit as she shared a small private smile with Harry.

Harry quietly asked Sirius, "What kind of restaurants are there in town?"

Sirius smiled and replied, "I think I'll let that be a surprise for you two. Walking or driving into town?"

Harry yawned and replied, "Walking, figured I've had enough driving for the day." Sirius nodded as Harry took Hermione's arm and they walked down the drive and towards town for dinner and a walk.

## Meanwhile in Prague

A meeting of the elders had not been called into session in nearly two centuries and yet here today they were called into session to consider a proposal from a potential ally. The power structure in the Czech Republic was considerably different from that of Great Britain. The oldest pureblood families in the country took turns ruling the magical community and a meeting with each head of all of the ruling families rarely happened for security reasons.

Jiri Moravec was the head of his family and after the obligatory ten year period for the current ruler came to an end, he would be leading his countrymen for his term. Being one of the youngest members on the board he was well doctrinized in the story of Harry Potter and his victory over Lord Voldemort. Therefore it came as quite a surprise when he was informed that Lord Voldemort was the special guest with the proposal to set forth.

Voldemort eyed the assembled group approvingly before he began to speak in Slovakian thanks to a translation spell. Voldemort regally said, "My friends, I come to you today in friendship and a promise of camaraderie."

Jiri watched skeptically well aware that Lord Voldemort never held any in esteem enough to be a friend. The trick of duplicity was what Voldemort presented and Jiri continued to listen with the dark lords game already found.

Voldemort continued as his red eyes scanned the room, "Many of you have heard of the defeats that the purebloods of Britain have suffered this year at the hands of Harry Potter. What most of you are unaware of is that Potter plans on moving on the purebloods of mainland Europe when he is done there."

Jiri had to stifle a snort listening to Voldemort spew his nonsense, and anyone with half a mind would be able to detect the lie in his words. Once again Jiri was surprised as many of the older members of the council appeared to be quite concerned at Voldemort's words.

Deciding that the mockery had went far enough Jiri raised his hand to make a statement and Voldemort motioned for him to speak before he said, "With all due respect Lord Voldemort, you must think us to be simple to accept your word as the truth. All of the

purebloods that have died in the past year have solely been your followers. Surely that can not be construed as a war upon purebloods your Lordship."

Voldemort's red eyes burned intensely upon Jiri before the dark wizard brandished his wand and coldly said, "Avada Kedavra." Jiri dropped to the floor dead with his eyes staring off into space. Several of the council members faced Voldemort with their wands drawn upon seeing their future leader dropped for a disagreement.

Voldemort sneered and fired off several killing curses at the older wizards in the room felling them in an attempt to even up the odds. Voldemort looked at the remaining members of the council and sneered as he said, "I will remember this act of defiance. Your day of reckoning has yet to come." Voldemort vanished with a furious sounding pop leaving the remaining ten council members to pick up the pieces of what in essence became a mass assassination. If nothing else, Lord Voldemort's first attempt at consolidating power had proved to be an unmitigated disaster.

### A Small restaurant in Downtown London

It was the lunchtime hour which meant one thing for the staff of the restaurant, lunchtime rush. Summer time was always worse for walk in customers so the manager Kevin have been forced to hire some new help. One of the new waitresses, a pretty redheaded teenager had initially struggled in her position but was coming in to her own in her second week of work.

Kevin noticed an unattended table and he called out to her, "Ginny, could you take table 10 for me?"

Ginny nodded as she hustled over to the table of teenage boys who appeared to appreciate her presence greatly. A dark haired boy asked, "Hey cutie, can we get some menus?"

By the time Ginny had been hit on by every boy at the table, she managed to receive a five pound tip. The summer had been a struggle in many ways, but for the first time Ginny had some money in her pocket and control of her own life. Things this year at Hogwarts were going to be different.

### Berlin, the Ritz Hotel

Draco Malfoy was in a large conference room attached to his personal suite that he had rented out for the summer in the interest of keeping a low profile. Draco had received a letter from Voldemort asking for a private audience with him, and this is where he found himself now.

Finally, the door creaked open and for once Lord Voldemort the darkest wizard of the land entered the room as any muggle would, through the door. Draco had to admit seeing the dark lord walking into a room took a little bit of the shine off of him that his father had placed from years of teachings. Draco bowed as was expected of him as he murmured, "Thank you for gracing me with your presence my lord."

Voldemort nodded and in the warmest voice he could muster he looked directly into Draco's eyes and said, "You are well aware that it was Potter that killed your father. I come today with a rare offer for revenge against Potter by taking the closest thing to a father he has."

Draco frowned and asked, "You want me to kill Black my lord?"

Voldemort's red eyes narrowed dangerously and he said, "Remember your place young Malfoy." Draco nodded and Voldemort continued, "No, I do not want you to kill Black. The boy showed this year that he could weather the loss of his guardian."

Voldemort steepled his fingers and said with more than a hint of venom, "I want you to help kill Dumbledore."

Draco's eyes widened and he stammered, "But my lord, surely the defenses at Hogwarts are too great to breach."

Voldemort smiled maliciously and he said, "My new potions master has developed a 24 hour version of the polyjuice potion. I will supply you with the name of a student's identity you must assume and it will be your job to dispatch of him and still have enough of the potion to carry out your task."

Draco nodded thoughtfully before Voldemort said, "Very well, if you should succeed in this task you will join me and be marked as my greatest general."

Draco merely nodded once again, well past the point where words would sufficiently capture his sentiments, and Voldemort stood and swiftly left the room and with a wave of his hand the door shut behind him leaving Draco trying to pull his emotions under reign.

Draco let put a deep breath as he buried his face in hands and murmured, "From one prison to the next."

Stanraer, Black Cottage

The first four days of their vacation had been some of the best and most relaxing of many of their lives. Harry and Hermione continued their slow exploration into the more intimate details of their relationship, not having reached the ultimate end yet but quite content with learning the other subtleties in pleasuring each other. Sirius and Emmeline had likewise been treating the vacation like a honeymoon and despite the rather liberal use of silencing charms the occasional vibration made its way to the other occupants' senses.

Today however, the house was bustling with activity as they all packed for a short weekend trip to Dublin to take in a little bit of the wizard culture of Ireland. Amazingly, Harry was the first one finished packing and he sat out on the swing on the front porch patiently waiting for everyone else to finish.

After several minutes of just watching the wind blow the beach grass around the door softly opened behind him and revealed Emmeline looking at Harry warmly. Harry offered her the seat next to him and she took it gratefully. They sat swinging in silence before Emmeline asked, "Harry, do you want me to tell a story about your father?"

Harry turned to Emmeline and asked, "Did you know my parents?"

Emmeline's eyes widened and she asked, "I never told you about my days at Hogwarts?" Harry shook his head and she made a distressed noise before wrapping Harry into a tight hug.

After she composed herself she said, "I was your mum's best friend back at Hogwarts. I told Hermione my story, so I am kind of surprised she didn't tell you."

Harry smiled slightly and said, "We don't tell each other everything. In fact, I imagine she didn't tell me probably because she wanted you to tell me if I know her."

Emmeline smiled knowingly and replied, "Yes that does sound like her." She bit her lip for a moment looking remarkable like Hermione for a moment before she said, "How about I start with a short story?" Harry nodded and she spent a few more moments in thought.

Finally she spoke, "I met your mum on the train on my way to Hogwarts. She and a brunette were sitting in a compartment talking about the sorting. The brunette happened to be your friend Neville's mum."

Harry nodded and asked, "What was my mum like?"

Emmeline smiled as she leaned over and patted Harry's hand and said, "She was the sweetest person I've ever known. She had such a big heart and always helped people when they needed it."

Harry smiled as he thought about his mom so he asked, "So what did you talk about on the train?"

Emmeline seemed surprised for a moment before she said, "Lily was asking me if I had tried any magic before. She was so anxious to start using some of the spells she had read about in the books. I don't think I've ever seen a muggleborn know as much about magic."

Harry softly offered, "You didn't know Hermione then."

Emmeline smiled and continued, "She asked Alice and me if we had tried some of the spells she was talking about. She was complaining about the ministry's regulation on muggleborn students, she was about as precocious as they came back then."

Harry smiled at the tidbit of information and asked, "So were you all friends straight away?"

Emmeline nodded and murmured, "We were all friends, even after I was sorted into Ravenclaw and Lily and Alice were sorted into Gryffindor. We sat together in the classes we had together, and we studied in the library often. We didn't really branch out to many other

people our first year, although I did get to know your father pretty well."

Harry's attention was rapt as he asked, "What was my dad like back in first year?"

Emmeline sighed and looked out down the drive in an attempt to gather her thoughts. After a moment she said, "James was a wonderful and infuriating person his first few years at Hogwarts. He had a huge heart, and then he would do something cruel just for laughs."

Harry frowned and asked, "What do you mean?"

Emmeline looked pensive for a moment before she replied, "Your father and Severus Snape would do awful things to each other. Initially it was simple stuff like regular house rivalry things. But, it quickly deteriorated starting their third year. Of course it didn't help when Lucius Malfoy and Sirius were egging it all on."

Harry nodded and asked, "What kind of stuff would they do?"

Emmeline furrowed her brow and after a moment she spoke, "It would be as simple as throwing hexes when they thought the other was looking, to as complex as spreading rather cruel rumors."

Harry frowned in thought for a moment before he nodded to himself and gave Emmeline a warm smile and said, "Thanks for telling me." He appeared troubled for a moment before he added, "I like hearing stories from Sirius about my parents, but sometimes I have to wonder if he didn't have an idealized version of my parents in his head. I like to know the good with the bad I guess." Harry ran a hand through his hair and looked right into Emmeline's eyes before he asked, "Does that make sense?"

Emmeline's breath caught as she saw James Potter reincarnate for a fleeting moment as Harry looked into her eyes. She took a steady breath and patted Harry's knee as she said, "It makes perfect sense sweetheart." Harry nodded apparently relieved with her response and they lapsed into a comfortable silence both lost in their thought for the moment.

Hermione and Sirius both came outside a few minutes later and noticed the serene moment Harry and Emmeline were sharing. Sirius tentatively shared a look with Hermione who shrugged before he said, "Everything alright out here?"

Harry looked up startled and grinned sheepishly before he said, "Sorry about that, we just got lost in thought."

Sirius and Hermione shared a bemused look at the understatement of the day before Sirius pulled out the portkey he had gotten a week earlier. Glancing at his watch Sirius said, "Alright you guys we have a minute until the portkey activates. Make sure you have a good grip on it when it takes off or you might have a rough ride to Dublin."

They all shared a laugh at the thought of landing in the sea somewhere between where they were and Dublin. They all vanished in a swirl of color leaving the cottage in a cyclone of magic, destined to take them to Dublin for a weekend trip.

Harry's experience with portkeys had admittedly been poor in the past, but this time he landed lightly on his feet along with the others of the group. What he didn't expect were the two giggling girls that grabbed his arms and dragged him into town. Harry managed to see the rest of the group being given the same treatment and called out, "Paddy, what exactly is going on here?"

Sirius replied, "Must be a wizard's fair kiddo, just hang on for the ride."

Harry wasn't too comforted by the answer as the giggling girls finally stopped pushing him in the midst of what appeared to be a carnival of some sort. Harry sought out Hermione and asked, "What do you know about wizard's fairs?"

Hermione wrapped her arm around Harry's and then said, "I've just read about mentions of them in books, I honestly don't know what we can do."

Harry nodded and Sirius gave them a wave and pointed at his watch before mouthing eleven o'clock. Harry assumed that this meant to meet him back at this spot at eleven. Harry smiled down at Hermione as he glanced down at the party in the streets ahead and said, "Fancy a carnival then?"

Hermione smiled sweetly and replied, "I'd love to."

They merely browsed the carnival and tried to check out the various attractions for nearly an hour, and Harry was relieved to see that no one had recognized him yet. Feeling a little frisky Harry asked Hermione, "So, anything you want to do?"

Hermione smiled sweetly and replied, "I wouldn't mind seeing that Gypsy fortune teller."

Whatever response Harry had been expecting that most definitely was not it and he was only able to manage a garbled, "What?"

Hermione giggled and replied, "I know, I know divination is a wooly discipline and all. But, I've always wondered what it would be like." Harry sighed but didn't fight when she dragged him towards the tent with the flashing sign that read "Madam Muerte Teller of Fates."

Harry groaned as they entered to the overwhelming scents of various incense being burned. Harry had flashbacks to all of the times his death had been predicted in Trelawney's room. An old lady with wispy white hair greeted them and said, "Hello children would you like your fortunes told?"

Hermione smiled as she dragged Harry into the room through the beaded curtains. They both sat down on the ground as the woman sat on a bean bag with a small stand and a crystal ball. Harry barely refrained from rolling his eyes as the woman went into a trance. Hermione caught Harry's eye roll and swatted at his arm as the old woman finally began to speak.

In what most muggles would consider a foreboding voice she said, "I see times of struggle ahead for the both of you. But love will flourish in the dark times ahead. There will be death to many that are close to you, but you will persevere. Light times are ahead if your council is pure and true."

Harry and Hermione shared a look before Hermione asked, "Will I have children?"

The old lady was silent for a moment before she said, "You will bring much life into the world, but the lives you take will greatly outnumber it."

Harry sighed and whispered into Hermione's ear, "How many more questions do you have for Madam Muerte here?"

Hermione rolled her eyes and softly asked, "Is there anything else you can tell me?"

Madam Muerte replied, "Much has changed and much work remains."

Hermione nodded as she nudged Harry in the ribs as he handed the old woman the universal wizarding currency, a single galleon, before they exited the tent.

The remainder of the evening they spent in the games portion of the fair as Harry won Hermione a stuffed Hippogriff in the catch the snitch booth before they finally met back up with Sirius and Emmeline at the prescribed meeting point. Upon seeing the Hippogriff in Hermione's hands Sirius laughed and said, "Harry, Hermione and a Hippogriff, that brings back some fond memories."

Hermione squeezed the Hippogriff tightly to her chest and asked, "So what are the plans for the rest of the night?"

Sirius smiled and with a glance down at his watch replied, "Let's get checked into our hotel, and then we can go do a dance club I've heard about."

Harry arched his eyebrow and said, "Um, we're underage Paddy."

Sirius rolled his eyes and replied, "Trust me; you don't need to be of age at this club."

After checking into their hotel room and putting on the appropriate garb for a late night of dancing, Harry and Hermione knocked on the door to Sirius and Emmeline's room. After a moment of muffled noises the old witch and wizard walked out of their room.

Sirius smiled at Harry and Hermione with just a tinge of sheepishness and said, "You, um caught us in the middle of getting dressed."

Harry quietly mumbled to Hermione, "More like in the middle of getting undressed." Hermione giggled and Sirius turned around and eyed them suspiciously as they walked out of the hotel.

With a quick glance around Sirius said, "It's just a block from the hotel, so we should probably leg it."

After a ten minute walk they happened upon what appeared to be a small club with a flashing witch on a broom. Harry eyed Sirius suspiciously and he simply replied, "Sometime the best way to keep a secret is to keep it in plain view."

Upon entering the front door a large man that apparently was the bouncer stopped Harry and Hermione before he said, "You two got I.D.?"

They both manufactured their driving licenses and he slapped a pair of neon yellow bracelets on their arms before he said, "Just because you're Harry Potter, doesn't mean you're drinking tonight."

Harry nodded and said, "Just out for a dance with my girlfriend mate." The bouncer nodded and gave Harry an understanding smile as they entered the club which was a strange contrast in sights. It was obviously a magical club as the inside was much larger than it appeared from the outside, and some cleverly placed sound muffling charms separated the dance floor into two distinct halves. One half was playing typical dance club music as people gyrated against each other. The other half appeared to be a couple's dance of sorts as they swayed to the music played.

Harry looked at both sides impassively before Hermione pulled him down into the dance club proper as the strobe lights flashed and the beat of the music slowly began to filter into their ears the closer they got.

Hermione tugged on Harry's arm as they entered the dance floor and the throbbing beats in the background urged them to dance. Hermione turned her back to Harry as he wrapped his arm around her stomach. They slowly swayed to the music until the beat shifted

and Hermione did a decidedly un-Hermione thing, she lowered her bum and ground up against him. Eliciting a quite moan from Harry she turned in his embrace until her face was once again pointed at his. With a smirk dancing on her face she pulled Harry down into a languid kiss as they ground against each other for several long minutes.

Finally they broke the kiss looking very flushed and pleased with themselves. After catching their breath Hermione tugged on Harry's arm and said, "Let's go slow dance and see how Sirius and Emmeline are doing." Harry merely nodded as she led them back away from the dance floor and across the room to the other dance floor.

They found the older couple swaying to the music as a love ballad played in the background. Harry smiled at the sight before he wrapped his arms around Hermione's waist as they began to sway to the music together too. By the time they left the club it was nearly three in the morning, but their first night in Dublin had been lovely in every way.

A/N: Sorry about the long time it took to update. I've had the chapter outlined for awhile, it just took awhile to actually sit down and type it. The summer will begin to move quickly over the next couple of chapters as we will continue to check in on Voldemort and some training for the gang that went to the ministry. Figure 3-4 chapters until we get back to Hogwarts, and then the sixth year can truly begin. Thanks to all of my faithful reviewers, I hope you enjoyed the chapter.

Disclaimer: Pop quiz hot shot, you have a Harry Potter fan fiction and to avoid litigation from JK Rowling and her army of attorneys, what do you do?

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Cue Keanu Reeves looking even more confused than normal, before he says in his best surfer voice, "Duh say JK Rowling owns Harry Potter and all related characters and settings and not you?"

A bus speeds towards Keanu and explodes just as it hits him ejecting metal and exploded human beings all over the large room. Cue the author warily scanning the carnage for some sign of life before he says, "Yes like he said." The author frowns before he says, "Man, I actually liked him in Point Blank."

Exit the author shaking his head sadly before he picks up his foot and flicks a finger of some poor soul to the ground.

A/N: I believe it was Sean Connery who said never say never. After some thought I have decided to check in on Ron Weasley from time to time to check on his progress. If I get enough of a consensus on his character by the end of his boot camp, well maybe he'll make it back to Hogwarts after all for his sixth year as Harry and Hermione are in their seventh year. Thanks for reading and enjoy.

Berlin: the Ritz Hotel

A nondescript raven soared into an open window on the second to top floor of the high rise hotel carrying a spare parchment on its leg. Draco Malfoy saw the owl and released an anxious sigh as he unfurled the letter and read:

Young Malfoy,

This letter will serve as a portkey to a safe house where Bella will be waiting with your first month's supply of the potion and the specifics on the student you will replace. Merely tap your wand on the parchment and incant Mosmorde and you will be transported. Remember your word and your task, and you will take your place as my greatest follower.

L.V.

Draco gathered all of his necessary personal effects before he tapped his wand on the parchment and said, "Mosmorde", before he vanished in a swirl of color to an unknown location to travel further down the road seemingly already past the point of no return.

Somewhere outside of Atlanta, Georgia

A group of magical teens were running in place in a depression by a swamp. Every thirty seconds a large burly man pacing back and forth along the row of youths would blow a whistle and they would drop to the ground and do twenty pushups before taking a minute to catch their breath and start the cycle again.

A ginger haired teenager was the only one grumbling about the exercise as he muttered, "Stupid Americans, I can't believe my worthless parents sent me here. Soon as I get my wand back I'll show them all."

With ears honed by years of this specific form of "boot camp" Dave Anderson, a muggle born wizard whose father just so happened to be a third generation marine overheard the muttering. Dave marched over to where Ron was grumbling and he barked, "Do you have something to share maggot?"

Ron looked up with as much loathing as he could manage and spat, "Nothing you Yankee bugger, now leave me be."

Dave's face snapped into a feral and dangerous grin before he tipped Ron over onto his back in the mud, he crouched over him as he kicked a little bit of mud on to his face in the process. Dave finally spoke after a moment of measuring Ron to his very soul and he said in a low and dangerous tone, "I think for that little outburst, you get a stay in hell's bucket."

For the first time in awhile Ron was genuinely worried and he asked, "What's erm, hell's bucket sir?"

Dave tipped the aviators currently adorning his face slightly down to look directly into Ron's eyes, before he simply said, "Your home until you shape up you British pansy."

Unknown location somewhere in the British Isles

Draco Malfoy landed with a thump in a dirty room in the middle of an old decrepit building, a perfect place for a clandestine meeting. Dusting himself off in an attempt to muster some of his hard earned Malfoy dignity he heard a snicker from the corner.

Suddenly a sickly sweet voice said, "Hello nephew, you've grown much since the last time I saw you."

Draco walked over to the corner to find Bellatrix leaning against the wall with a slightly manic smile on her face. Draco attached the mask of indifference he had honed in years of loving abuse from his father, and asked, "What is my assignment aunt Bella?"

Bellatrix nodded over to the opposite corner where a trunk sat, and Draco walked over and opened the chest to find a piece of parchment sealed with the mark of Voldemort. Draco peeled the letter open and arched an aristocratic eyebrow before he said, "Hmm, I think I can manage as a Ravenclaw. Maybe if I'm lucky I can find some twit to pass the time with this year."

Bellatrix cackled in response before she said, "You will notice that you have just over two months worth of the potion in the trunk. You will receive your supply for October during the first Hogsmeade weekend of the school year at the end of September. Our potions master has procured enough hair for you to make it through the entire year. It was a stroke of genius by the dark lord to have him kissed but he kept the body alive for the potions sake. By the end of the year if you have succeeded, you will join the dark lord as he has promised."

Draco sighed indiscernibly and asked, "When will I take my place at Boot's home?"

Bellatrix manufactured a serpentine necklace and she replied, "You will have the rest of today to study the profile we have gathered on Boot, and then you will touch your wand to this portkey and take your place at his home. Your wand will be glamoured to appear as Boot's. You will find that no detail has been spared to chance. The dark lord has very high hopes for you Draco, do not make that hope misplaced." Bellatrix blew Draco a kiss before she vanished with a soft pop.

Draco pulled a chair from the far corner of the room and began reading the profile that had been provided as though his very life depended upon it, and it did.

Black Manor, London

The vacation had finally come to an end and it was a very relaxed and focused Harry and Hermione that entered into the first phase of their training from Dumbledore. As they walked into the training room for their first session they spotted the headmaster sitting at what appeared to be a conjured table with a pair of empty chairs for his young protégés.

With a smile tugging at the corner of his lips the old wizard said, "Please Harry, Hermione take a seat. I would very much like to talk before we begin today."

Harry and Hermione took their offered seats and Dumbledore continued, "You both have vast amounts of power and I have it on first hand account that you scared Tom greatly with your showing at the ministry. I believe that he will go even further down his path so that he can match you Harry and fulfill the prophecy from his end."

Harry frowned and asked, "What else can he do to increase his power?"

Dumbledore replied with an odd tenor, "He will sacrifice more innocent witches and wizards to bolster his own power in the darkest of rituals. He was a powerful young wizard in his time at Hogwarts. This can be attested to by his use of unforgivable curses at such a young age. However, his power and knowledge paled in comparison to what you and Hermione have managed at your young ages. For this reason alone, Tom will force a final confrontation sooner than later."

Hermione finally spoke and she asked, "What do we need to learn to beat him?"

Dumbledore took a deep breath before he said, "We need to destroy what remains of Tom Riddle to kill Lord Voldemort."

Harry went to ask what he meant but Dumbledore merely raised his hand and said, "It will become apparent what I mean when the time comes. I'm afraid that I can not give a more complete answer than that, because I do not have one." Dumbledore stroked his beard in deep thought for a moment before a little bit of the familiar twinkle returned to his eyes and he said, "But, I shall endeavor to teach you everything that I can, that much I promise to you."

Harry and Hermione shared an eager smile, at the possibilities of what the greatest wizard of his age would be able to teach them about magic. Dumbledore stood and after Harry and Hermione did the same, he flicked his wand and the table and chairs disappeared.

Dumbledore's face became somewhat grave as he said, "I must ask that you do your training separately."

Harry arched his eyebrow and asked, "Why do we need to do that?"

Dumbledore peered down his glasses with a look devoid of malice and he said, "One shortcoming of sharing a soul bond as you two have is that the individuals you are may get lost in the process."

Hermione made to speak but Dumbledore merely raised a hand in a plea to continue, which she accepted with only the slightest hint of indignation. Dumbledore smiled gratefully and said, "I do not wish to diminish what you and Harry have built in your time together, but I must ask you something."

Hermione frowned and asked, "Yes?"

Dumbledore softly asked, "How have your goals changed since you and Harry have been bonded?"

Harry's face became somewhat inquisitive as he turned towards Hermione also awaiting her answer. Finally she managed to say, "I wouldn't say my goals have changed, they've just reprioritized."

Dumbledore smiled knowingly and asked, "Am I to guess that all of the highest priority goals involve Harry now?"

Hermione frowned and replied, "To be frank professor, Harry has been a part of my life and its goals since I had any idea what I wanted to do with it. So what you are insinuating isn't appreciated."

Dumbledore nodded and then said, "Let's just assume that what you say is the truth." He stroked his beard for a moment before he decided to change tacts and said, "I would very much like to work on your respective strengths first. Once we have honed your individual skills then I will work to hone your skills as a pair."

Hermione sighed but nodded her approval and Dumbledore smiled exultantly before he said, "Very well, Harry you may stay and watch Hermione train or you can do something else with your time. Your session will take place in the afternoon Harry and the same offer stands for you as well Hermione."

With a pair of determined nods Dumbledore and Hermione began their session as Harry practiced his sword play in the other end of the training room.

Moody Manor, the other side of London

The training for the other four members of the DA that followed Harry and Hermione into the ministry had taken a slightly different path than that of their peers.

Neville dove under a yellow beam as he dodged a sword slash aimed at his head from Kingsley. Suddenly the lights in the room blazed on and the thump of Moody's wooden leg echoed throughout the room. The oft-scarred retired wizard barked out his mantra, "Longbottom you must exercise constant vigilance. All of this dodging does no good if you wish to win the battle. I've already went over this with you and your little friends. When the final battle comes you will be guarding your friend's flank against Voldemort's inner circle. You won't be able to do that if you're constantly dodging attacks. Remember boy, you are fighting for everything. Don't let your own hesitation doom you."

Neville nodded as his face was flushed with determination following Moody's speech. The old wizard smiled and patted Neville on the shoulder before he stomped back out of the room. The lights flashed and Neville assumed an attack position.

Moody watched from a control room as each of the four began their work in earnest, for the first time since they had arrived a week earlier. The ex-auror smiled a smile born from fighting the forces of

evil for over half a century and he quietly said to himself, "Now the real training begins."

### Boot Residence, Liverpool

Draco's first week in existence as Terry Boot had been the epitome of typical, and Draco for one was glad that Terry Boot had been such a bland person before he was replaced. But today, the Boot family was making a trip to Diagon Alley to let Terry choose a present. In a way Draco found it quite amusing that Darren and Lisa Boot had birthed their child less than a week before Potter was born.

Draco was broken from his musings as his "mother" Lisa called out, "Terry sweetheart, we're leaving in ten minutes. Your dad got us a portkey to the Leaky Cauldron."

Draco sighed as he sat down the book on defense he was reading and looked into the mirror on above the bookshelf on the wall. He mussed up his hair a little going for that windblown look that had all of the girls eating out of Potter's hands and silently had to admit that he could have been several worse looking blokes for his mission. That alone meant that he could probably manage to get a shag from time to time if he played his cards right. Taking his job as done, he grabbed a jumper from his wardrobe and walked out of his room closing his door behind him.

Darren and Lisa shared an amused look at their pseudo son as he walked down the stairs and Darren said, "You know son, just because some girls like hair like that, it doesn't mean they won't like you for who you are."

Unaccustomed to a parent who actually cared for him, Draco smiled sheepishly as he grasped the portkey with his parents and they vanished to their destination.

### Diagon Alley

As fate would have it Ginny Weasley had received a special dispensation to pick up supplies because it was to be her OWL year. The previous year had led Ginny to make several new friends from other houses, and she was surprised to find that many boys harbored a crush on the only Weasley girl, in those ranks was Terry Boot.

Ginny was certain that Terry fancied her by how he blushed whenever she happened across him in the halls in between classes, and she had to admit he was cute and she probably wouldn't say no if he asked her out on a Hogsmeade weekend.

Just as Ginny walked out of Flourish and Bott's intent on going to Fortescue's to treat herself to a sundae before returning to Percy's flat and prepare for the double shift she had the next day. Her mood was bolstered as she spotted Terry with what appeared to be his parents and seeing as how she once was a Gryffindor she summoned her courage and walked over to him to invite him to talk over sundaes.

Ginny walked over and said, "Terry."

Terry turned around and smirked as he saw Ginny which was rather strange behavior before the smirk disappeared and he said, "Hello G-Ginny."

Draco most definitely had not been expecting to see the Weaselette today, but in the profile it said that Boot had a crush on the diminutive redhead and Draco had to admit she had become quite pretty despite her upbringing.

Ginny smiled at Terry and his parents and she introduced herself, "You must be Terry's parents. I'm Ginny Weasley; I go to school with Terry. I was wondering if he'd like to catch up over some sundaes at Fortescue's."

Darren smiled at the girl well aware of the previous year's happenings at Hogwarts, but equally aware that she seemed genuinely interested in Terry and he said, "Well go on son, it's not every day such a pretty girl asks to chat over ice cream."

Draco actually blushed, which was a new experience for him but he said, "Um, I'd love to Ginny. Is there any special occasion?"

Ginny glanced over at the boxes in Darren and Lisa's hands and saw the party favors and she coyly said, "Let's call it a birthday present." Terry smiled slightly and his father practically pushed him towards Fortescue's.

Ginny decided to break the awkward silence that had descended on the walk to Fortescue's and she asked, "Have you gotten your OWL results back?"

Draco shook his head in the negative and said, "They usually show up around the first of August, so we should have a week to go still."

Ginny nodded and then asked, "How has your summer been?"

Draco shrugged and replied, "Boring mostly, did a little bit of traveling and now I'm just being lazy."

Ginny giggled and said, "Oh that must be nice. I've been working full time this summer."

Draco groaned and said, "That must be dreadful."

Ginny smiled as Draco held the door open for her and they ordered their sundaes and ate and talked about school and their friends. Even though Draco would never have thought it possible, he had begun to slowly fall for the independent and feisty redhead by the end of their talk.

As Ginny left the tip and paid the bill as his birthday present, Draco was overtaken by a strange compulsion and he leaned over and kissed Ginny on the cheek. Ginny flushed and Draco asked, "Um Ginny, would you maybe like to go with me to the first Hogsmeade weekend on a date?"

Ginny smiled and said, "I'd like that a lot Terry." She hugged him and then whispered into his ear, "Stop by my compartment on the train and we can talk then."

In that one brief moment Draco had forgotten that he was actually still in the guise of Terry Boot and after a moment to regain his composure he nodded before he watched Ginny head back out towards the Leaky Cauldron. Cursing himself inwardly Draco vowed that he would be more careful from this point forward.

Black Manor, London-July 30th

"Harry, you have to have a birthday party." Hermione huffed in exasperation.

Harry smiled slightly and patiently replied, "Hermione love, we are already having two vacations this summer. I really don't think that a birthday party is necessary."

Hermione walked over and wrapped her arms around Harry's waist and murmured into his chest, "You deserve a party Harry, and I don't think the day before your party is the day to be having this discussion."

Harry gave out a resigned sigh before he said, "Fine, but try to keep the party to a minimum."

Hermione leaned up and gave Harry a kiss on the lips before she pulled away and said, "I promise that you'll have fun Harry."

Harry arched his eyebrow in question, but decided to ignore the fact that she said nothing about keeping the party small, and asked, "Are you excited about starting our training together in a couple of days?"

Hermione led Harry over to the couch before she sat down in his lap and replied, "I have to admit that I have been rather lonely during training the past week. But, I've learned so much that it has been worth it."

Harry smiled and kissed her temple before he said, "Yeah who would have guessed Dumbledore knew so much."

Hermione giggled as she scooted out of Harry's lap and placed her feet at his beck and call. Harry rolled his eyes, but obediently began to rub her feet and he asked, "So this bikini you are going to be wearing in Greece, do you think I'll like it?"

Hermione blushed and nodded before her eyes lit up and she exclaimed, "Oh, our OWL results should be coming with our N.E.W.T. selections and book lists soon."

Harry poked her ribs lightly and she squeaked before he said, "I'm sure you did amazing love."

Hermione sighed contentedly as Harry rubbed her feet and she murmured sleepily, "I can't wait until we get to Greece."

Harry envisioned a small black box in his room for a moment before he replied, "Either can I Hermione, either can I."

Black Manor, London-morning of July 31st

Harry Potter awoke to the smooth soprano of Serenity Smith on the WWN as his alarm clock went off at 7 am on his birthday.

Harry was rubbing the sleep out of his eyes when Serenity said, "A Happy birthday wish to the boy-who-lived Harry Potter. Today is his sixteenth birthday so if you see him today wish him a sweet sixteenth."

Harry groaned as he rolled out of bed, thankful that Dumbledore had given them the day off from training for his birthday. Harry had thought he was prepared for the training thanks to his daily workouts, but Dumbledore made sure to stretch him in ways he never would have thought possible.

Harry took a nice and long birthday shower before he made his way down the stairs to find a very large spread of his favorite breakfast foods prepared by Dobby and Winky. Sirius was alone sitting at the table as he read the prophet, and for some reason Harry's sixteenth birthday had made front page news.

Harry sat down heavily before he piled some eggs and toast on his plate and poured himself a heaping glass of orange juice. Sirius slowly folded his paper before he said with a smile, "Happy birthday kiddo."

Harry mumbled a response but upon seeing Sirius' arched eyebrow he swallowed his mouthful of eggs and replied, "Thanks Paddy, actually I'm just looking forward to a break from training for a day."

Sirius chuckled and said, "I promise there won't be any training, but I doubt you would classify today as a break."

Harry ran a hand through his still damp hair mussing it further before he asked, "What exactly is going on today?"

Sirius smiled sheepishly and muttered, "Big party."

Harry took a bite from his toast and chewed it slowly before he swallowed and asked, "Did you just say big party?"

Sirius cleared his throat and replied, "Um yes, it's not like you turn 16 every day. Seeing as how you've only had one other birthday party before, we figured we would make your last birthday before you are considered an adult one you would remember for the rest of your life."

Harry took a long swig of his orange juice before he sighed and said, "Ok, but I am going up to the library to stretch out my legs in my form. I haven't had much chance to in awhile, so just have Hermione get my when the party is ready to start."

After finishing his birthday breakfast in silence Harry trudged up the stairs and walked into the library to enjoy a bit of solitude before the insanity that was sure to be his birthday party. After a couple of hours of sniffing around and bathing in the sun by the window in the library, Harry heard foot steps outside of the door and transformed back just in time for Hermione to enter the room looking rather pleased with herself.

She eyed what Harry was wearing and appeared to nod to herself after a moment, seeming to indicate it was acceptable before she asked, "Are you ready for your party?"

Harry nodded as he wrapped her up into a hug before he pulled away and said, "Yes, but you have to promise to protect me from all of the people."

Hermione giggled as she wrapped her arm around his and as they exited the room she said, "You don't need me to promise, I'd do it anyways."

Upon entering the parlor room Harry was greeted by a chorus of "Happy Birthday" from the vast majority of his friends.

Hermione led him to what appeared to be a throne and upon sensing her boyfriend's apprehension she giggled and whispered into his ear, "It's your birthday Harry, you're king for the day; Hence the throne."

Harry rolled his eyes but sat down, and waited until Sirius gave him a crown and scepter to complete the illusion. Finally Hermione called for everyone's attention and she said, "Thank you for coming to Harry's sixteenth birthday. Seeing as how he is king for the day we decided to call him his majesty until the end of the party. First we are going to have cake and then we are going to do presents. Once we're all done with that the twins here can direct you to the game room downstairs if you want to stay and play. Otherwise thanks again for coming to the party."

Dobby wheeled in a huge cake covered in chocolate frosting and the small elf announced, "Master Harry Potter's cake is served." Dobby snapped his fingers and the cake disappeared leaving several plates with slices of cake sitting on the conference table in the middle of the room.

Dobby personally handed Harry his slice before hugging his legs and the little elf tearfully said, "Happy Birthday Master Harry sir."

Harry chuckled as he took a bite of his cake and said, "Well what are you lot waiting for, enjoy the cake." Several in the room laughed before taking a piece of cake and chatting with the other party goers."

The twins walked up to Harry and began their concert of speech. Fred said, "Happy birthday your majesty."

George continued, "From your humble servants, we bring you news."

Harry watched as the conversation volleyed back to Fred, "We have consolidated our profits from the school year and managed to rent a space in Diagon Alley for Weasley's Wizard Wheezes. We plan to put Zonko's out of business by the end of the year."

George added, "Seeing as how you were our primary start up investor we deemed your birthday celebration as the perfect time to hold a shareholder's meeting to discuss company business."

Fred continued the soliloquy of sorts, "In addition to our new place of business we need to hire on a staff and we would like to think you would approve of our choices, Angelina and Alicia."

Harry smiled and nodded and was about to speak when the torch was passed to George, "Additionally we thought it might interest you to know that it appears our little sister has a new boyfriend of sorts."

Fred continued, "We spotted them carrying on at Fortescue's a few days ago, and wanted to inform you."

Finally Harry spoke without interruption, "That's good news about her having a boyfriend. I knew she was going to be at the alley because Hermione had approved a special dispensation from her punishment to pick up OWL review supplies." Harry scratched his chin for a moment before he asked, "So who is this bloke that has gained your only sister's attention?"

George replied, "It was that Boot fellow from Ravenclaw."

Harry nodded and replied, "That's good, he seems to be a good fit for her." Fred and George nodded in tandem before wishing their birthday wishes once again and giving a casual warning about his present.

After several more minutes of small talk and idle chit chat, Sirius sounded a fake bugle, playing the king bit to its very limits, before he regally announced, "The king may now open his presents."

Harry rolled his eyes as everyone in the room laughed at the spectacle before each of his friends urged him to open the present from them. Given that despite everything the last year had been for Harry, he was still quite uncomfortable accepting gifts without placing a tremendous amount of sentimentality on them. Dumbledore had once again given a thoughtful and practical gift as he promised they would finish the staffs he had promised the previous year before the summer was over. Out of all of the gifts he received those from the people closest to him, got right to the heart of what it was to be Harry Potter, for the good and ill of it.

Remus and Sirius had found a way to create a series of pendants which they showed to Harry and promised Hermione one for her birthday as well.

Remus explained, "Harry, what you have there is something Paddy and I call the Marauder's pendant. Seeing as how the four of us make up the small number of people the map still recognizes

amongst the living marauders, we devised a way to always keep in touch in case of an emergency. It's sort of a remote link to the map too."

Sirius decided to chip in and said, "See look here." Sirius tapped his wand to his pendant and spoke the same password as the map required and a floating three dimensional version of the map appeared complete with moving symbols for Argus Filch and Filius Flitwick. Sirius tapped his wand on the pendant once more and the map disappeared before he expectantly asked, "So what do you think?"

Harry aptly covered both his and Hermione's feelings on the gift with a whispered, "Bloody brilliant." Apparently the response was what the two older marauders were hoping for as they shared a satisfied smile before passing Harry on to the next gift giver.

Emmeline came next and she said, "I know I promised to tell you stories about your parents and I will. But, I thought it might help to have an additional resource." Emmeline handed Harry a small leather bound diary with the engraved initials E.V. on its cover. Explaining herself further Emmeline said, "This is my diary from my first two years at Hogwarts. I thought you might like to read it over and get an idea what it was like growing up with your parents." Harry smiled and pulled Emmeline into a soft hug, which clearly expressed his gratitude for the gift much more eloquently than words could at the moment.

Finally, the last gift remained as the room had emptied to either leave or test out the game room in the basement, leaving Harry and Hermione alone.

Hermione smiled beatifically at Harry before she handed him what appeared to be a small wrapped book of some sort. Harry arched his eyebrow but she said, "I thought this might come in handy for our trip next week."

Harry nodded and opened the book to find a book on a tourists guide to magical Greece which also included the most vital of Greek phrases for when they were out in public. Harry was about to thank her when she placed her finger on his lips and softly said, "That's not all of your present Harry, but the rest will be a surprise when we get there."

Harry nodded although his mind was whirling with a million different possibilities as to what that could actually mean.

A/N: Well, another week another chapter. I hope everyone is enjoying the sequel so far, and I promise another chapter next week some time. Next chapter, we go on a tour of magical Greece and also check back in with Voldie, Draco, Ron, Ginny, and pretty much everyone else I can think of. Also, next chapter we get OWL results. I know that doesn't sound too exciting but getting grades was always my favorite part of school. Thanks to everyone that has reviewed already and thanks for reading.

Disclaimer: I'm pretty sure I own my car, but I know that I don't own Harry Potter and all of the settings characters because JKR does. Although if she's interested in a trade, well she knows how to reach me.

Black Manor London, August 2nd

The flash in the FLOO connection brought Dumbledore bearing more than his typical training gear. On this specific day he also held in his hand the OWL results for two young Gryffindors that held a special place in his heart.

Looking around the empty parlor room he softly called out, "Dobby."

Dobby arrived with a small pop and he asked, "What can Dobby do for Mr. Dumbledore sir?"

Dumbledore handed the elf the two envelopes and asked, "Can you give these to Harry and Hermione for me please?"

Dobby popped into the library as Harry and Hermione were researching some new spells in preparation of the battles ahead. The little elf softly said, "Master Harry and his Hermione have mail."

Hermione looked up from her book and her eyes lit up with excitement as she squealed and ran over to Dobby giving the little elf a hug before she took the two envelopes from the ministry.

Suddenly lacking the ability to breath she handed Harry both envelopes and rasped out, "I want you to open mine first Harry."

Harry smiled gently and led Hermione over to the couch before he slowly opened the envelope and read:

Hermione Jane Granger O.W.L. Examination Results

Class Theory Practical Overall Assessment

Ancient Runes O O O

Arithmancy O O

Astronomy O O

Charms O O O

Care of Magical O O

Creatures

Defense Against

the Dark Arts O O O

Herbology O E O

History of Magic E E

Muggle Studies O O

Potions O O O

Transfiguration O OO

Overall Class Rank- 1st, Congratulations on your excellent results and if it so interests you Professor Flitwick has offered to take you on as an apprentice for your charms mastery.

Harry finished reading and a sly smile came to his face before he said, "Congratulations love you got ten outstandings and one exceeds expectations."

Hermione's face relaxed and she squealed jumping into Harry's arms and giving him a deep kiss. She pulled away and with a mischievous smile she pushed Harry down on to the couch and said, "Ok, now it's your turn to play the waiting game." Hermione peeled open Harry's envelope and read:

Harry James Potter O.W.L. Examination Results

ClassTheoryPracticalOverall Assessment

Ancient Runes O O O

Arithmancy O O

Astronomy O O

Charms O O O

Care of Magical O O

Creatures

Defense Against

the Dark Arts O O O

Herbology E E E

History of Magic E E

Potions O O O

Transfiguration O O O

Overall Class rank- Third, Congratulations on your excellent results, if it so interests you contact Professor McGonagall about an apprenticeship in Transfiguration.

Hermione's eyes were dancing with unshed tears, and Harry asked with a concerned expression, "Are you ok sweetheart?"

Hermione smiled and she jumped into Harry's lap kissing him soundly, before she pulled away and said, "You did amazing Harry. You received eight outstandings and two exceeds expectations. McGonagall even offered you an apprenticeship in transfiguration."

Harry's eyes widened before he replied, "I forgot to tell you, but Flitwick offered you an apprenticeship too."

Hermione gave Harry a quick peck on the lips before she said, "Ok we'll deal with class selections and this other business later. I think we deserve a day off after getting our results back."

Harry yawned as he wrapped his arms tightly around her and he replied, "I couldn't agree more. I think today we have a mutiny and Dumbledore can stuff his training for once."

Hermione giggled and asked, "Would you like to go watch a movie somewhere?"

Harry nodded and Hermione said, "I've heard about a movie that has been huge in the states. We'll go watch that later. There are supposed to be aliens and lots of explosions so you will probably love it."

There was a knock on the library door and with a collective sigh they stood and walked over opening it to reveal Dumbledore who already looked resigned to taking the day off from training himself. The old wizard smiled and asked, "Am I too assume you would rather take the day off to celebrate your successes than work with an old man?"

Harry and Hermione shared a look before Hermione replied, "We were thinking about spending the afternoon muggle sir. That is, if it is alright with you."

Dumbledore smiled and said, "Despite my old age I remember what it was to be young. Seeing as how you both will be traveling to Greece in a week however, I suggest that today is your last day from training until you depart."

Harry smiled and replied, "I think we can manage that sir, and thank you for understanding."

Dumbledore inclined his head in recognition and said with a smile, "Oh tosh don't think on it my boy." He turned to both and added, "Enjoy your day and congratulation on your excellent results."

Dumbledore disappeared down the stairs and Hermione scanned Harry for a long moment before she said, "Well, if you plan on going out with me then you need to put on some proper clothes. I'll have Winky set out an outfit for you while you get a shower. Of course I need to do the same, no reason on wasting an opportunity to show you off, now is there love?"

Harry's eyes had crossed slightly by the end of Hermione's mutterings and he said, "I'm just going to go get that shower."

Hermione giggled at the expression on Harry's face and smiled to herself for a moment before she set off to find her mother to ask her what she should wear for the date.

Several hours later found Harry and Hermione exiting the cinema and Harry asked, "You ever wonder what it would be like if someone made movies about our lives?"

Hermione rolled her eyes and replied, "Haven't you had enough action tonight without worrying about that?"

Harry smirked slightly before he bent slightly down and gave Hermione a deep kiss bordering just on the safe side of public decency. He pulled away and said, "Let's go home love." Hermione merely nodded as they walked to a deserted alleyway before manufacturing their wands and taking off in a blur on the Knight bus.

Moscow, Rasputin's temple August 8th

Few historians, or at least few muggle historians, ever delved into the charismatic man named Rasputin and his seemingly unnatural long life. Historical documents had been tampered with to allow historians to believe that he was born in the middle of the nineteenth century, when in truth he was born near the beginning of the eighteenth century. At the time of his death he was a robust two hundred and twenty years old. Even for a wizard his life was a long one and much of that was owed to his dabbling and creation of many dark arts.

It was in this pursuit that an order that in many ways was the counterpoint to the order of the phoenix was formed slightly before the old wizard's death. One of Rasputin's prized pupils just so happened to be Octavius Grindewald who turned out to be Dumbledore's greatest rival in the years following. While the death of Rasputin's prodigy did force Rasputin's order into the shadows, it did not stop them from putting their mark on the dark arts throughout the twentieth century, and it was in this vein of thought that brought Lord Voldemort to their doorstep in attempt to sway the greatest assembled force of dark wizards in the world today.

Using the journals of Grindewald that he had come across in his travels leading to his first reign of terror nearly twenty five years earlier, Voldemort pulled out his wand and uttered the killing curse directly at the bust of Rasputin which connected and triggered a lever which pulled the iron gate up as Voldemort strolled in to the lair.

An alarm sounded as he crossed the threshold entering the main chamber of the building and he took a seat at one of the chairs surrounding a large circular table. Within minutes the chamber had filled with several menacing witches and wizards who all had their wands trained at the man with dark hair and streaks of gray in it. Only when he stood from his seat and his blood red eyes scanned the group that the wands were slowly lowered when recognition flashed in the majority's eyes. He silkily said, "Hello brothers and sisters of Rasputin's esteemed order. For those of you, who do not know me, I am Lord Voldemort and I come bearing a proposal."

By the end of the meeting Voldemort had procured the full support of the group, which was quite impressive considering they numbered over two hundred and were all skilled in the dark arts unlike many of his surviving deatheaters. For the first time since before the disastrous Diagon Alley attack, his forces had been strengthened greatly and his gain would be Potter's loss.

Heathrow Airport, August 10th: 6 am local time

Leaving for Greece seemed like such an appealing idea to the assembled group aside from the elder Granger's insistence on taking more traditional forms of transportation throughout the trip after hearing Harry's description of portkey travel one day earlier in the summer.

Harry and Hermione hadn't protested about flying first class, at least not until they heard their departure time was seven in the morning. But, with only a small amount of cajoling the young couple found themselves waiting for their boarding call outside of the gate they were departing from. The passport he had procured the previous summer the week following his birthday still did the trick admirably and Harry's first trip through security went off without a hitch.

Suddenly over the quiet and dreary air of the airport in the morning the loud speaker sounded, "Flight 640 departing for Athens is now boarding."

Harry and Hermione smiled as they handed the attendant their tickets, and then followed David and Elizabeth wheeling their carry-on suitcases behind them that had been with the aid of magic (Shrinking Charms) filled with the assorted clothes and other toiletries that they would need for their two week sojourn.

They took their seats and the surrounding seats remained unfilled as a few others comprised the entirety of the first class population. The flight took off without a hitch and Hermione pulled the itinerary that Harry had agreed to for their first week in Athens, with the added condition that the second week they relax and do whatever they felt like.

Hermione leaned over the console separating their seats and she said, "Harry, from what I've read the best magical sites in Athens have a form of muggle repelling charms like Hogwarts so mum and dad won't be able to see the temple of the gods with us on Tuesday."

Harry shrugged and then a wicked smirk covered his face and he replied, "Hermione, you know what they'll be doing as soon as we get out of sight."

Hermione blushed lightly but simply replied, "I only hope you'll still find me to be attractive enough to engage in those activities when I'm my mum's age."

Harry closed the remaining distance and gave her a tender kiss before he pulled away and said, "I imagine you'll be trying to figure out ways to get rid of me when we're old and gray and I'm still randy as a teenager."

Hermione giggled and swatted at his arm before she said, "Oh honestly Harry where do you think of these things." Harry merely smiled in return content with the knowledge that his statement had been exactly what she needed to hear. They had been going out for over a year and a half and he was finally getting the hang of the whole boyfriend business. Initially in their relationship, Harry had found affection the best way to handle most situations with Hermione. But, over the past few months it had occurred to him that infusing affection, or at least the physical kind at every turn, cheapened the overall value of affectionate actions as a whole.

Pulling out a book on the history of Puddlemere United he squeezed Hermione's hand one last time before he lost himself in the history of his favorite Quidditch team although it was charmed so that if a muggle should see it, then it would appear to be a book about the history of premiere league football.

Boot Residence, Liverpool August 10th

Draco or rather Terry had done quite well on his OWL examinations leaving Draco with some interesting decisions for the coming school year. Of course he already knew that Boot was a prefect the previous year and would be retaining the position for his sixth year as well. The problem in class selections simply lay in how often he could risk being in Potter and Granger's presence and still keep his secret. It hadn't come as a large surprise to learn from his father, before his untimely death, that the Scarhead had managed to learn Occlumency and legilimency in his fourth year. Seeing as how plain it was to see, that how talented Potter and Granger were only served to stoke the fire of his extreme dislike for the pair that masked his jealousy of their talents.

Finally deciding to cut divination from his schedule after a long debate, he chuckled when he first saw Boot's results finding it incredibly hard to believe a Ravenclaw would take the class, and not opt for a more reputable pursuit such as Arithmancy as he had. At least he had until he was kicked out following his attack on Potter at the ball, which in hindsight causing Potter pain didn't seem to be as worthwhile of an exercise any more if it meant losing access to his education.

Unfortunately the death of his father at the hands of Potter at the ministry had placed the last remaining Malfoy heir in a bit of a quandary. He had planned on forestalling the ceremony forcing him into Voldemort's ranks until he was of age and could procure a small measure of his fortune, and then go into hiding. Even if he didn't think mudbloods belonged in the magical world, it didn't mean he thought they should be tortured or killed. So despite Lucius' teachings his son had no aspirations to follow in his footsteps, and instead was content with living the good life for as long as his money lasted.

Finishing his class selection he frowned as he realized he would still have several classes with his two biggest rivals. Pulling out a catalog he had procured in a little side trip while he was shopping with his parents in Diagon Alley he also sent out an owl order for a book on Occlumency hoping he could at least give himself some protection by the time he reached Hogwarts in three weeks.

Athens, Greece InterContinental Athenaeum Hotel August 13th

"Harry if you plan on spending the day with me you had better get your arse moving!" Hermione yelled in exasperation as their taxi would be arriving in the lobby soon to take them to the Akropolis and by extension to the magical Mecca known as the temple of the gods.

History recorded the Greek gods as immortals who lived high on Mt. Olympus, but the truth of the matter was that the "Gods" were a collection of benign and malevolent witches and wizards that used their powers to control the masses of non-magical people of the time. The temple of the gods was in essence the ancient Greek equivalent of the ministry and Hogwarts combined. That very fact excited both Harry and Hermione greatly; although by appearances Harry wasn't nearly as excited as he had originally let on or as Hermione would soon find out, excitement and anxiety on Harry's part.

In the bathroom Harry practiced his proposal speech for what seemed to be the thousandth time, and each time he stumbled over the words in a different part. With a glance at his watch he released a resigned sigh and exited the bathroom to find Hermione looking the part of gorgeous girlfriend quite easily. Of course Hermione beamed Harry a megawatt smile seeing him finally exit the bathroom wearing a polo shirt and Khaki shorts and a strange twinkle in his eyes.

Hermione's smile changed to a look of puzzlement well aware that something was afoot and she asked, "Harry, what are you planning today?"

Harry looked at her, his expression inscrutable, and he evenly replied, "I thought we were going to the temple of the gods, why?"

Hermione arched her eyebrow but nodded slowly before she took his hand and tugged him into the elevator and down to the lobby to wait for their taxi. After a couple of minutes the taxi pulled up in front of hotel and they piled into the cab silently. The conversation was in broken Greek with the driver whose name was Alexandros and as they reached the temple Harry gave him the necessary Drachmas and a generous tip to which the young Greek smiled his thanks before taking off to his next destination. Hermione never noticed Harry's apprehensive look as he fingered the engagement ring in the

change pocket before placing it in his pocket much like his heart had been placed in his stomach.

The temple of the gods was a magically hidden temple in the distance beyond perhaps the greatest Greek symbol of pride, the Akropolis. Much like the ministry of magic a phone booth acted as the conduit to deposit magical people into the now museum.

After roaming the expansive building for an indeterminate amount of time they reached the exhibit Harry had been waiting for, the tribute to Athena Greek goddess of wisdom. Hermione was busily reading the various inscriptions when Harry dropped to his knee and plaintively said, "Hermione."

Hermione turned to Harry and began to speak, "Yes Ha... ", before she covered her mouth as the beginnings of tears welled in her eyes.

Harry swallowed heavily before he said, "Hermione, I like to think for all of the bad things fate has done for me, meeting you has made up for it ten fold. The day we bound our souls together for eternity was the day I knew that in so many ways we'd never be the typical couple that dates and have a long courting process. I've said it before but it bears repeating, you and you alone hold the keys to my heart and soul, will you marry me?"

Hermione dropped to her knees next to Harry and cupped his face tenderly as she smiled at him beatifically and softly replied, "Yes."

Harry pulled her into a deep kiss before he pulled away minutes later and placed his forehead on hers before he said, "Well my goddess, I only thought it fitting to ask for your hand in marriage in a place befitting your role in my life. So, what did you think?"

Hermione giggled tearfully before she softly replied, "I think you did brilliantly Harry, I love you so much." After a moment she smiled and teasingly asked, "Did you have a ring or do I have to beg?"

Harry's eyes widened and he fumbled around in his pocket for a moment before producing a diamond and ruby encrusted engagement ring. Harry slipped the ring on to her finger with his own trembling hands, before he shakily said, "I already asked for your hand from your parents so they had a sneaking suspicion what I was going to do today."

Hermione snorted and muttered something about reading her parents minds before she looked deeply into Harry's eyes and softly said, "Just wait Harry, I have a surprise in store for you next week that I think you'll enjoy very much."

Harry smiled and kissed Hermione softly once again before they rose back to their feet in tandem, never breaking the kiss, and in the process pulling into a tighter embrace. Finally, they pulled apart enough to be discernible as two separate people and with a cautious glance around Hermione asked, "Why aren't there any other people in here Harry?"

Harry sheepishly smiled and replied, "Um, confundus charm."

Hermione rolled her eyes but still smiling she said, "I think you can take it down now Love."

Harry nodded and without pulling either of his wands he gestured with his hands and the charm was cancelled, once again allowing others to enter the room without being compelled to go elsewhere. Of course as Hermione looked down at the ring lined with rubies and emeralds she suddenly had the compulsion to be somewhere, anywhere, and alone with Harry once again.

As they reveled in their new status of being engaged they moved on to the exhibit for the main gods of Olympus. Harry was reading the inscriptions on Zeus with a bit of interest as Hermione scanned the exhibit on Hermes across the room.

The lighting in the large temple was spotty in some places and in order to finish reading the inscription Harry wandlessly cast a lumos spell lighting the tip of his finger with an ominous red glow. The panel Harry had been reading slid open revealing an ancient text. Harry tentatively grabbed the book and it was inscribed on the cover with a rune that looked exactly like the faint scar that still existed on his forehead.

The book let off a flash of golden light and Harry suddenly felt the compulsion to keep it with a familiar voice in his head said, "Your destiny does not end with the prophecy, you can not live until the other is dead."

Harry shook his head, suddenly feeling very tired, and then he surprised Hermione, who had missed the entire exchange, when he quietly asked, "I'm suddenly not feeling well Hermione, can we leave?"

Hermione frowned as she noticed Harry's scar was a little more noticeable than normal as the edges of his scar appeared to have been irritated by something. Hermione wordlessly took his hand and led him back to the phone booth where they called a cab and returned to the hotel engaged to be married and now confused by the events coming at the end of their day trip.

Outside of Atlanta, Georgia August 13th

Ron had found that life in hell's bucket made him reassess pretty much every notion about women and bigotry that he had ever believed in. Of course for an individual who loves food and fun the bread, water, and staring at the dirt in his place of residence, the week had been almost as bad as being placed under the cruciatus curse.

As he sat on the cold hard ground being swarmed by mosquitoes, someone knocked on the far wall before the door to his prison swung open revealing Dave who appeared almost giddy at the prospect of giving the smarmy Brit residing inside another earful on the reasons why he was an idiot.

Suffice to say he was surprised when he noticed the broken look on Ron's face before the ginger haired teenager murmured, "I'm sorry."

Dave raised a skeptical eyebrow and asked, "What are you sorry for?"

Ron looked up with sadness in his eyes, "I'm sorry to you for being rude and disrespectful. I'd like to have the chance to apologize to everyone back at home for being horrible but I know I probably don't deserve that chance. I mean I almost raped Hermione and if Harry hadn't come when he did I would have. It makes me sick to my stomach when I think about that now."

Dave's face was still stuck in a skeptical expression before he said, "Consider this reprieve a show off good faith Weasley. I will question you with Verisateum eventually to see if this change is because of

guilt or fear of punishment, either way your best behavior or you'll be back in here."

Ron's eyes lit up and smiled softly as he said, "I promise I'll be on my best behavior sir."

Dave snorted as he ushered the red head out of the small room and muttered, "Why does that not comfort me in the slightest?"

Black Manor, London August 13th

"Sirius, have you ever heard of a squib named John Tolkien?" Dumbledore asked as he stared unseeingly out the enchanted window in the parlor room.

Sirius looked to Remus who was wearing a knowing but guarded expression before he replied, "I'm afraid I don't follow Albus."

Dumbledore smiled inwardly before he continued, "He was an accomplished author and a friend of mine for many years. Upon his passing I grieved for a very long time. But, John had so much wisdom residing in his soul, a wisdom which I feel compelled to share with you. My feelings at the moment are encapsulated in a particularly famous line in one of his stories."

Sirius was now rather confused, but he nodded and said, "I do hope this line ties all of this together."

Dumbledore chuckled and then his expression became rather melancholy and he said, "It was spoken by a wizard in his tale, and on occasion John would say that I was responsible for his creation of the character. In a time much like our own a great conflict crested upon the world he created, the wizard spoke these words, 'The board is set, the pieces are moving. We come to it at last...The great battle of our time.'"

Sirius frowned and asked, "Do you think a battle is imminent Albus?"

Albus sighed before he quietly replied, "I believe we rest at a great precipice, and if my heart is correct Tom has made this a war that could destroy everything wonderful and good in our world if he should succeed. I believe my own destiny is coming to its completion, and I do not know if this extends to the end of the

conflict before us or if it does not. But, for the first time in nearly one hundred years, I feel that when I leave the world, it will be in better hands than my own and that comforts me much more than anything else these dark days."

Remus and Sirius could only nod in agreement because the words of the old wizard had effectively stunned them into silence. The war, which had already led to many casualties, had only just begun and it would get much worse before it got better.

A/N: I'm sorry but I can't resist quoting Gandalf, especially if Dumbledore is reciting the quote. Next chapter, we have Hermione's surprise, a mission for a horcrux, Voldemort's tendrils extend, and we have a brief Ginny update before we finally board the big red train once again.

Thank you to everyone who has taken the time to review and offer any words in response to my writing. Please keep reading and if you have the time, please review.

Disclaimer: Ok fancy this little scenario, I'm walking down the street and a crazed homeless man jumps out of a dumpster and screams at me, "You know that JKR owns all of the characters and I like the taste of shampoo right?"

Sensing that agreement was the best route in the presence of the shampoo taster I nodded and replied, "Yes I know that JKR owns all of the characters, settings and any other miscellaneous material related to Harry Potter. The shampoo thing I find interesting though."

The homeless guy made one last strange squawking noise at me before he twirled his cape and jumped back into his dumpster.

Alright enough insanity, on to the chapter!

Athens, Greece InterContinental Athenaeum Hotel: Friday August 23rd

Harry found that officially having Hermione as his fiancé entitled him to a few more liberties in the presence of her parents than before. When before a deep kiss would be frowned upon, after their engagement and on their various tourist excursions David and Elizabeth really had no objections and would often smile fondly at their own remembered engaged stage.

Hermione likewise had been hinting that tonight may finally be the night where they could finally enjoy the greatest perk of their newfound engagement and she had even 'accidentally' left some lacy lingerie on the bed the night before.

At the moment they found themselves sitting at the restaurant off of the lobby of the hotel as they enjoyed some fine Greek cuisine. Hermione had been sending off several subtle signals like a possessive pat on his thigh and giving him what could only be called bedroom eyes on more than one occasion.

As Harry took his turn and paid the bill the flush on Hermione's cheeks finally told Harry everything he needed to know for the remainder of the night. Harry took Hermione's hand and softly asked, "Are we going to need some privacy tonight love?"

Hermione blushed lightly but gave Harry a tender smile before she murmured, "Yes I think we will Harry."

After a rather uncomfortable trip on the elevator they reached their floor and as they reached the point where they separated Harry addressed David and Elizabeth and softly said, "Um, Hermione and I are going to be indisposed for the remainder of the night, so don't bother to stop by." David and Elizabeth shared a knowing smile before they gave their customary night adieu and entered their room.

Harry unlocked the door using the key card and Hermione rushed into the room before she turned with a shy smile and said, "I need to get changed in the loo, why don't you get ready for bed while I'm inside?"

Harry gestured with his hand and a combination of silencing and security charms put the room on lockdown for the rest of the night. Quickly shrugging his clothes Harry was down to his boxers and he dimmed the lights to give off enough light to still see but not too much to feel exposed. He quickly cataloged everything he needed to be careful for and as he finished his checklist Hermione walked out of the bathroom wearing a reasonably conservative set of lacy red bra and knickers.

Harry's breath hitched in anticipation and fear as she sat down on the bed snuggling into his arms before she said, "Harry, I want you now. We'll have plenty of time later for foreplay."

Harry nodded and hooked his fingers into the edges of her knickers and slowly slid them down her body taking care to kiss the insides of her thighs as he trailed down her body. Harry slid back up her body and Hermione pushed him back down unto his back and returned the favor as his reaction to her like always sprung out. Hermione stroked him once prompting Harry's eyes to roll into the back of his head as she gave a possessive smile and moved to straddle his hips. Harry reached up and put his hand on her abdomen which glowed a bright gold for a moment indicating the contraceptive charms success before Hermione leaned down and kissed him as she undid the front clasp of her bra freeing her small pert breasts.

Hermione arched up her hips slightly as she positioned herself over Harry and she murmured, "Just go slow Harry, and go with your instincts." She slowly slid down on him as she half whimpered and half moaned quietly before she stopped for a moment growing

accustomed to his welcome intrusion. With a determined breath she sunk down the remainder of the way wincing but stilling any tears that threatened to fall down. Harry was squirming in anticipation beneath her as she had stilled, but he refused to move until she gave him the signal, which she finally did as she rocked her hips gently against his. Harry spent the remainder of the night taking care of Hermione in this new experience, and by the end of the night they had both enjoyed this next phase of their relationship.

Downtown London, England Friday August 23rd

Ginny Weasley let out an exhausted breath as she made the short trip from the place that had been employer's location until about fifteen minutes earlier ,when she finished her last shift before returning to Hogwarts in just over a week.

Keeping her wand in her palm, just in case, Ginny fumbled in her purse for her key as she approached Percy's apartment. Finally finding the key to the apartment as she reached the door, Ginny unlocked the door to find a small note from Percy indicating he was out with Penelope for the evening.

Ginny shrugged out of her work uniform, already having promised that she would return to work next summer, and she plopped down on the couch in the living room/her bedroom as she turned on the television immensely grateful that her brother was dating a progressive muggleborn like Penelope.

After having a small dinner Ginny rummaged through her things to do some OWL review, as she half watched the telly at the same time. With a glance at the clock confirming it was nearly midnight Ginny turned off the set and folded out her bed, counting down the days until she'd be able to use her wand outside of an emergency again.

Black Manor London, England August 24th 6 pm

The full compliment of order of the phoenix was meeting for the first time of the summer to discuss disturbing intelligence uncovered by none other than the exiled potions master Severus Snape.

Dumbledore stood as he addressed the group in their typical meeting place of the parlor room, "Severus has come across information that has indicated that Voldemort has gained some very

powerful allies in Moscow. The only assembled group that would fit Tom's ideals in Moscow is an order of sadistic dark witches and wizards that follow in the footsteps of Rasputin the Vile."

All of the older members of the order looked grim and Harry and Hermione shared a look of consternation before Neville raised his hand and asked, "Who was Rasputin the Vile?"

Dumbledore sighed and replied, "I believe it has come time to ask Professor Binns to step aside when such a crucial figure has went unremembered by the majority of our youngest members." After a moment of contemplation he replied, "Rasputin the Vile was so called because he spawned the most recent generation of dark lords from his teachings. Octavius Grindewald was Rasputin's protégé, and if my memory is correct the only son of Octavius is amongst the ranks of these dark wizards. These individual will put what you deemed cruel beforehand a mere triviality when you come upon the aftermath of their actions."

Everyone in the room paled a little bit more before Dumbledore concluded his impromptu history lecture as he said, "The one bright point that this information brings about is that these people refuse to use unforgivable curses, seeing them as a weaklings way out of dark magic. Octavius in fact split from his master when he began to use the curses. If legend serves true the only unforgivable the group uses are to enter their lair in Moscow."

Harry finally entered the discussion and said, "The little Hermione and I have found on the group indicate that their will be muggleborn and muggle massacres in the times ahead. These people will not shed the blood of a pureblood or half blood on principle alone unless they are engaged in battle. Based upon our best estimates, the group has only supported up to roughly 200 people at one time. While that force is great, the auror ranks and the order will easily provide ample resistance to defeat the new forces if we act soon to take out the thrust of Riddle's forces."

Moody and the Dumbledore brothers shared an awkward look before Moody said, "If we manage to find their headquarters I believe that you are right lad."

Dumbledore looked around the room to see if anyone else wished to speak, and upon seeing nobody he simply said, "So mote it be. If we

come across reliable information we will plan a joint raid with the ministry in an attempt to cut Riddle's forces down where they sleep. This meeting is ended."

The group began to file out as Dumbledore walked over to Harry and Hermione and he said, "As you are both aware we have a mission for the final piece in two days. I suspect that you will be adequately rested and prepared for our departure Monday morning at 4 am." Harry and Hermione nodded and exited the parlor room. Upon reaching the top of the stairs Hermione asked, "My room or yours tonight Harry?"

Harry smiled and replied, "I was thinking my room tonight love. Tomorrow night we can sleep in your room to make sure that we get up on time. Why don't you get changed and say goodnight to your mum and dad, I'll be in my room."

Hermione nodded as she parted ways with Harry and headed towards the library and her room. Harry opened the door to his room and quickly stripped down to his boxers before he sat down heavily on the edge near to the nightstand. Harry slid open his drawer and laughed at the sight inside before he reached in and grabbed the tiny dragon that he still had from the first task of the tri-wizard tournament. The little dragon was just as irritable now as it had been when Harry had first gotten it, although with a wave of his hand a second miniature horntail was conjured and Harry sat the pair back in the lightly scorched drawer and watched them.

Hermione padded into the room where she spotted Harry looking into the drawer on his nightstand as he would occasionally chuckle. Hermione arched an inquisitive eyebrow before she wrapped her arms around Harry and murmured into his ear, "What are you doing love?"

Harry smiled before he turned and nuzzled her neck for a couple of minutes. Finally, Harry pulled away and replied, "Just giving an old friend someone to spend his time with."

Hermione glanced down into the drawer and giggled at the sight of the miniature horntails as they appeared to be playing, or at least as much as a dragon could play. Hermione slid the drawer short and pushed Harry down onto the bed before she huskily said, "I have a new friend of mine that I think needs some company." Harry smirked

before he grasped Hermione's hips and rolled until she was pinned beneath him.

Harry's eyes were twinkling as he said, "I'm pretty sure the friend wants to play too." Harry ran his hand up Hermione's thigh and the rest of the night was lost to the rhythm Harry set.

Black Manor London, England Monday August 26th 4 am

Harry and Hermione had gotten up an hour earlier and were discussing the prior day's visit to the department of mysteries in their capacity as junior unspeakables. Harry did some research while in the department on the book he had found in Greece, and was surprised to find that another prophecy had been made regarding the prophesized wielder of the book.

The one on the path shall find the book

A terrible destiny must be completed before the book will become clear

On the waning side of the eighth month it will be revealed

Immediately Harry knew that the prophecy had referred to him simply by the expedient that he could remove the prophecy and listen to it in the first place. All of the hopelessness and despair he felt upon hearing the first prophecy, had been repaid several times over in the hope and firm belief that he would complete the first prophecy when the time was right.

Harry was rubbing at the little soul patch of black hair he had managed to grow over his two weeks in Greece as Hermione said, "I can't imagine what the path is, but everything else fits Harry."

Harry nodded before he glanced at his watch and finished his cup of tea and said, "I guess we'll deal with it when we get to it. But, for now we have to finish getting ready because Dumbledore should be here soon."

Hermione nodded as she put on a jumper covering her dragonhide suit and snapped both of her wands into their respective holsters. Harry did much the same but slid Gryffindor's sword into a magical

scabbard on his back that shrunk it down to a manageable size while he was walking around.

Just as they finished the fireplace flashed a brilliant green as Dumbledore stepped through the FLOO connection in what could be considered battle robes and a large staff in hand. The old wizard smiled down at his two apprentices before he said, "Ah very good you are both ready. If we make haste we can reach the entrance before any wandering eyes may take it in."

Harry arched his eyebrow as Dumbledore opened a small satchel at his side and threw it into the fireplace as he stepped in and said, "Leaky Cauldron."

Diagon Alley, London England

Harry and Hermione followed suit and found themselves in the private FLOO destination at the back of the pub. Without rousing any attention they all cast disillusionment charms on themselves and quietly walked out of the bar with no one any the wiser that they had been there in the first place.

Upon reaching an alleyway by the junk shop at the far end of Diagon Alley Dumbledore said, "I believe it is once again time to make ourselves visible." With a wave of their hands they shimmered back into existence.

Hermione softly asked, "What are we doing here sir?"

Dumbledore smiled as he touched two seemingly random blocks on the wall and they slid out of place before the bricks shifted and clicked into place leaving an open wall and what appeared to be a set of stairs leading into the caverns making up the bowels of Diagon Alley. As he stepped into the darkness below he tapped his staff on the ground and it immediately became a shining beacon of light. The old wizard turned back over his shoulder and asked, "Shall we?"

Harry and Hermione shared a smile before following the headmaster down the stairs leading to the final non living horcrux in existence. The stairway spiraled down for several hundred feet as the only sounds heard were that of water dripping and the occasional screech of a bat. Harry looked over at Hermione and said, "Who

would have known such a lovely setting could be found two hundred feet below Diagon Alley?"

Hermione giggled and replied, "Shush you; less talk more walk." Harry rolled his eyes as they continued the remainder of the walk in silence before finally reaching the end of the stairway as Dumbledore conjured a bench and sat down heavily.

The old wizard smiled after a moment and said, "Pardon an old man but a moment's rest after that walk would be very much appreciated."

Harry smiled and sat down next to him on the bench as Hermione followed suit and sat down next to him taking care to grasp his hand and give it a comforting squeeze.

Dumbledore spoke after a moment and said, "As you are both aware, we are in search of Tom's final inanimate horcrux. After a fair amount of research I came upon the knowledge that Tom worked at Borgin and Burkes following his graduation from Hogwarts. Apparently he was in charge of finding items of great value and purchasing them at far below their actual value. This is where he came across Slytherin's locket and Ravenclaw's reading glasses. He also came upon Helga Hufflepuff's cup and discarded its use as a horcrux because he viewed Hufflepuff as a house of weaklings. It would not surprise me in the least if this is why he simply referred to young Mr. Diggory as a spare the fateful night of his death."

Dumbledore shook his head in sadness and continued, "After using a very old book on finding artifacts to narrow down the location of the glasses to beneath Diagon Alley I at once knew where to look. This passageway was built by Octavius and his followers back in 1942 in an attempt to reach the lower vaults that the Gringott's goblins had constructed. Young Tom Riddle most likely was introduced to this location in his dealings at Borgin and Burkes. I have no doubts that he put into place a very challenging set of obstacles to any but himself to reach the glasses. But, we must be off if we are to do so today."

Harry and Hermione stood soon followed by Dumbledore as the bench vanished with a vague gesture of his hand. The old wizard smiled and beckoned at Harry and Hermione before he said, "Come, adventure awaits."

They walked for what nearly an hour as they wound their way through the catacombs until finally reaching what appeared to be a dead end. Hermione's eyes lit up and she cast a quick wind spell revealing a twisted set of runes. Hermione frowned in thought before Harry said, "We need magical blood to open the doorway." Dumbledore gave his two pupils an appraising look before he conjured a dagger and sliced his palm on the final rune. Suddenly an archway began to glow in the rock wall before vanishing leaving a door to the next room.

Hermione turned to Harry and asked, "How could you translate that so quickly Harry?"

Harry shrugged as he walked into the archway behind Dumbledore and replied, "Too much reading I guess." Hermione cracked a small grin in response and followed her fiancé even further into the depths.

The next room was eerily reminiscent of the potions room that they had encountered in their first year at Hogwarts en route to the philosopher's stone. Hermione smiled at the memory and said, "You're a great wizard Harry."

Harry looked over his shoulder with an arched eyebrow and cheekily replied, "And you are a great witch Hermione."

Dumbledore in a slightly reproving voice said, "Not now you two, time is of the essence. There will be time for flirting later."

Hermione looked mortified but Harry chuckled and said, "We were just commenting on how similar this room is to the one we encountered first year en route to the stone."

Dumbledore's eyes lit up with recognition and a hint of apology before he said, "Ah I understand now, so Tom expects us to drink from one of the cups and the proper cup leads to the glasses and the other leads to our death."

Hermione pondered aloud, "Could the proper cup be Hufflepuff's cup?"

Dumbledore stroked his beard for a moment before he replied, "I believe that hypothesis is the best we will have to work with. Fortunately I memorized the spell to locate a founder's artifact."

Dumbledore waved his staff in a circular motion as he muttered a long string of Latin under his breath, a bright yellow beam shot from his staff and locked in on a modest gold cup. The cup was filled with a pea green liquid of some sort much the same as the other cups.

The old wizard looked at the cup for a few minutes before he said, "It is funny when a man no matter how old confronts his own mortality. I am not afraid to die because my love awaits me there, but I would very much regret not being able to see you to the end."

Dumbledore took a drink from the cup and said, "It appears as though we have chosen wisely. The liquid must be under a form of enchantment because a door has suddenly appeared in the far corner of the room. I suggest you both drink so that we can move on to the next and hopefully last challenge." Harry and Hermione each took a drink from the cup and the door that Dumbledore had mentioned faded into existence.

Dumbledore twirled his robe and walked over to the door waving his staff once and stepping back as the door opened. A stream of fire darkened the stone on the wall behind where Dumbledore had been standing.

Harry snorted and asked Dumbledore, "Looks like we have a dragon next, eh?"

Dumbledore turned to Harry with his eyes on full twinkle and dryly replied, "It would appear so yes."

Hermione could help but snort once before she smoothed her jumper and said, "Well let's get to it then, or are you boys going to sit around and play all day."

Dumbledore chuckled and replied, "It has been a time since I've been referred to as a boy, but I must agree with your overall assessment just the same Ms. Granger."

Harry sighed and said, "You two draw its attention I'll deal with it."

Dumbledore and Hermione nodded as they brandished their wands and staff and stepped back into the doorway. Dumbledore cast a strange ice spell which froze the dragon's fire in its mouth and the old wizard said, "I suggest you move Mr. Potter."

Harry nodded and took off at a sprint towards the Chinese Fireball guarding the entrance as the ice in its throat began to crack. Hermione cast a powerful stunning spell with slowed the dragon slightly as Harry unsheathed his sword and dove headlong at the dragon's head embedding it up to the hilt directly between the beast's eyes. The dragon slumped to the ground and Harry gestured with his hand sliding it out of the doorway and into the corner of the huge cavernous room it had been guarding.

Harry was sheathing his sword when Dumbledore and Hermione entered the room. Hermione jumped into Harry's arms and gave him a deep kiss before she pulled away and asked, "Are you ok Harry?"

Harry simply nodded once and turned to Dumbledore before he asked, "Where to next Professor?"

Dumbledore frowned in thought for a moment before he replied, "The horcrux should be somewhere in this room, because I sense no magical exits."

Hermione bit her lip as she pulled away from Harry and said, "Could the horcrux be concealed in the room?"

Dumbledore nodded before he turned to Harry and said, "I believe that you just call for the horcrux using your Parseltongue skills my boy."

Harry nodded and took a deep breath before he hissed the only revealing spell he had learned from his Parseltongue book, "Revealō."

In the center of the room a cylindrical table appeared with the glasses on top of it. The three walked up to the glasses and Dumbledore cast a spell on the surrounding area before he said, "Go ahead Harry it is safe."

Harry nodded and plucked the glass from the stand before he conjured an unbreakable container and slid them inside before he

sealed it. Harry shoved the container into his pocket before a low rumbling reverberated throughout the cavern. Dumbledore's eyes went wide and he said, "We must hurry, it appears as though Tom has tied the glasses to an inferi attack."

The three took off in a sprint towards the door as corpses began to rise out of the ground. Dumbledore breathlessly said, "Magic alone can not stop inferi, remember to use the wall of fire spell that I taught you. Harry please wield your sword to buy us any time you can."

Harry nodded and summoned the dragon carcass before he once again pulled the sword still drenched in dragon blood. Harry sliced the dragons head off with a long stroke before he dragged it to the entrance of the room and set it on fire. Thanks to the chocolate frog card and a bit of research Harry had long ago found that Dragon's blood was in and of itself highly flammable.

Dumbledore praised Harry, "Very resourceful, but that will only stop the inferi in that chamber for a time. We still have much to endure." Harry nodded as he spun the sword in his hand running behind Hermione and Dumbledore back through the potion room. Inferi began to rise from the ground and Hermione cast the fire spell isolating half of the undead in the far half of the room. Harry swung his sword down as an inferi reached for Hermione's wand and the corps's arm fell to the ground in a spray of dark blood.

The three sprinted out of the archway that had been opened by Dumbledore's blood and took off down the long corridor leading to the stairway and freedom. Thanks in no part to their exercise regiment Harry and Hermione were handling the running a bit better than Dumbledore who had begun to lag behind. Harry and Hermione slowed their pace allowing the old wizard to catch back up. Dumbledore smiled and said, "I apologize for my slow pace, but being 150 years old does come with its shortcomings."

Harry and Hermione smiled, but their smiles dropped as they rounded a corner a wall of inferi was waiting for them. Hermione pulled her wand and yelled "Flatus" as a wave of percussive force blasted the inferi back several feet. Harry stepped forward and took the sword at the group pulling his wand into his left hand he used the same spell and it knocked the inferi back a few more feet.

Dumbledore yelled from a few feet behind, "The inferi are coming up behind us quickly."

Harry frowned before he swished his wand and said, "flamma maximus" as a wide stream of fire shot through the inferi leaving large piles of ash where they had stood a moment earlier. Dumbledore arched his eyebrow at the display but didn't say anything as they took off in a sprint down the corridor as ash was kicked up into the air.

Upon finally reaching the stairway Dumbledore said, "Well that was almost anticlimactic." Upon seeing the disbelieving expressions on Harry and Hermione's faces he added, "I said almost."

After a slow climb to the top of the stairs Harry turned to the other two and said, "Well, was that worse or better than you had expected it to be?"

Dumbledore pulled his glasses off the bridge of his nose and wiped them off on his robes before he replied, "Before the inferi I would have to admit it was better than I had hoped. After the inferi it was far worse than I had expected. If not for the fire spell you just invented in the corridor it would have been the worst possible scenario."

Harry shrugged and replied, "I needed a big fire." Dumbledore rolled his eyes as Hermione giggled and they exited the archway back into the light of day and Diagon Alley.

King's Cross London, England September 1st

The week following their mission for the final Horcrux had been a week of the utmost relaxation. Harry and Hermione had sent the acceptance of their apprenticeships to Professor Flitwick and Professor McGonagall and their class selections for the next two years. Now as they stood just outside of the big red train that would lead them into another year, they were a part of a world that teetered on the edge of outright war. But, unlike the rest of the students Harry and Hermione had the power in their hands to end the war, and they would do everything in their power to do so.

Harry expelled a deep breath as he squeezed Hermione's hand. After releasing the end of the breath he said, "Guess we better be

on our way then." Hermione smiled as Harry's hand rubbed her engagement ring and squeezed his hand as they boarded the train on their way to another year at Hogwarts.

A/N: Well that actually went better than I thought it would. I hope everyone enjoyed this chapter because next chapter we return to Hogwarts, but the war in Great Britain will truly begin. Thanks to everyone that has taken the time to review, and if you have time after you finished reading here drop me a line and tell me what you thought of this chapter. Thanks for reading.

Next chapter we have a new defense professor (Tonks was only filling in), and gasp a new history of magic professor. If you make a guess as to who they may be I'll reply to your review and tell you if you're right. I will also give a brownie point to anyone who can tell me where I got the idea of the chapter title from. Remember to review!

Disclaimer: The universe of everyone's favorite wizard in training belongs to JKR and not me.

### Hogwarts Express, September 1st

Harry and Hermione climbed aboard the Hogwarts express and quickly took the first empty compartment for their own. Hedwig and Crookshanks were let out of their carriers as their owners curled up on the bench on one side of the compartment waiting for the prefects meeting.

Eventually Luna and Mathias entered the compartment and quickly caught up on the happenings of the summer. The four teens had all undergone a transformation physically and mentally over the course of the summer. Harry was now a little over six feet tall and Mathias was only a couple of inches shorter. They both were tanned but for drastically different reasons. Harry's because he had taken two separate vacations in the sun, and Mathias' because part of Moody's training involved long runs on the beach in the heat of the day.

Meanwhile the girls had both lost the little bit of belly they had gained from a year of Hogwarts food, and looked as relaxed and tanned as their boyfriends. Harry glanced at his watch before he turned to Luna and asked, "Luna, where are Neville and Susan?"

Luna turned to Harry and airily replied, "Neville said something about wanting to spend some time alone with Susan, but personally I believe he was bitten by a fuzzy nosed Dinglebat."

Despite the fact that Harry had gotten to know Luna quite well in the past year, occasionally her little comments would still drive him a bit batty. After a nice and long thirty seconds of Harry opening and closing his mouth, Hermione took pity on her flustered fiancé and said, "Harry, we need to get to the Prefect's meeting."

Harry shifted his eyes to Hermione and nodded, instantly regaining his composure. Quickly rising to his feet he took Hermione's hand much like he had a year earlier and they exited the compartment leaving the two Ravenclaws guarding their possessions.

As they walked forward in the corridor leading to the head student's compartment, the door to the compartment directly in front of them opened revealing Terry Boot, who looked at the pair for a moment

with something akin to fear before it vanished behind a warm mask complete with a friendly smile. The momentary lapse had gone unnoticed by Harry, who was paging through his memory of the previous year's meeting, but Hermione caught the slight movement and catalogued it in her protect Harry file that had grown quite full over the years.

They followed Terry to the head's compartment and took their seats before the heads had actually arrived from their own rounds.

Inwardly Draco berated himself as he sat as far away from the two Gryffindors as possible. Fortunately, Terry Boot had never been known as liking Potter because he had a crush on Hermione for the longest time, and after Hermione had rebuffed any even friendly overtures during the past year he had become cold towards her as well. In a way Terry Boot had offered him the perfect alibi to keep his distance while still staying close enough to observe.

The Head Boy and Girl both so happened to be from Ravenclaw as Eddie Carmichael and Cho Chang had been selected to lead the student body. In the past Ravenclaw had the highest proportion of head students, because an idiot wouldn't be expected to lead the students and unfortunately the other houses weren't typically as gifted academically as the others. Primary exceptions to that rule were the marauders generation of students and the present group of Gryffindors a figurative second generation of sorts.

After the meeting the heads assigned the Gryffindors the last patrols on the ride, meaning that this year Harry and Hermione could return to their compartment and relax before doing their rounds. On the way back Harry and Hermione ran into a group of students that they both remembered had gone to Durmstrang when they visited a couple of years earlier. A boy who appeared to be around their age spoke in almost fluent English as he saw the pair approach, "You are Harry Potter, yes?"

Harry nodded and asked, "Did all of you transfer here this year?"

Everyone in the group nodded before the same sandy haired boy replied, "We wish to leave Durmstrang because of its dark magic leanings and come to Hogwarts. I am Vladimir Gorinski, I will be in my sixth year, much as you are, yes?"

Hermione smiled and said, "Yes we're in our sixth year. We're both prefects, so if you have any problems acclimating yourself to Hogwarts feel free to ask us for help."

Gorinski smiled and said, "Thank you for the kind offer." The boy turned to Harry and said, "You are very lucky to have such a kind and beautiful fiancé yes?"

Harry smiled and replied, "I like to think so. Please keep the fiancé thing quiet though, if it gets spread around the media will go nutters."

Gorinski nodded and replied, "I understand Lord Potter, my grandfather was very influential wizard and my family has had to deal with media many times."

Harry smiled at the forthcoming young man before they excused themselves down the train and to their own compartment. A dark haired boy with curly hair turned to Gorinski and asked, "Vas it vise to speak to Potter already?"

Gorinski turned towards the other boy and with a practiced patience replied, "Remember Ivan, it is wise to make our presence as non-threatening as possible until the time is right. My father will not accept failure as an option if we are to take Hogwarts as the dark lord wants." The rest of the boys nodded their understanding and the few girls in the group remained silent as was their learned role.

Upon reaching the great hall, Harry smiled thinking that the present year was already looking up without the menace of Umbridge in the castle. Harry had opted to take 8 N.E.W.T. level courses just as Hermione had. With the added strain of undergoing independent study for additional mastery training in transfiguration or charms, Quidditch, and prefect duties it was going to be a full year albeit a little less hectic than the previous one.

Additionally, Harry had agreed to reform the defense group with any members still attending Hogwarts and to meet once a month to keep all of the skills developed the previous year sharp for the war ahead. It was going to be a long year, but with any luck Harry hoped the war could be over by the end of it. Little did he know that it no longer was a battle between two wizards, it was a battle for the very way of life

everyone on the side of light had fought for tirelessly the past two years.

Great Hall, Hogwarts September 1st

Harry and Hermione had taken their seats at the head of the Gryffindor table displaying the leadership that they needed to send a message to the rest of the school. A few of the less informed students whispered amongst themselves about the absence of Ron Weasley and although everyone knew he was gone, only a select few knew the actual reason for it.

Harry glanced around the hall and noticed that the Slytherins appeared to be quite uneasy about something although Nott sneered at Harry and mouthed "Mudblood lover". Harry smiled and gave the Slytherin a dismissive headshake before he focused on McGonagall as she brought the stool and hat forward for another year and another sorting hat song. The doors to the great hall swung open and a very large group was standing at the archway, including all of the transfer students from Durmstrang.

The group filed into the great hall and stopped short when the hat began its song:

The days are dark the outlook bleary

To the cautious and brave alike be leery

The song is a warning much like those in the past

The dice have been recaptured and prepare to be recast

The battle draws closer and yet time still remains

The school must unite to retain its domain

Be it Green and Silver with its heroes cunning and sly

Or yellow and Black with those loyal and shy

Red and Gold will lead the crusade with courage and bravery as the weapons of the plight

Black and Blue must remain united, wily and wise to know the time to fight

If the houses remain divided as they are then day will become night

I warn you all now that things are not as they appear

Unless peace if found we will all lose something dear

Be it friend or foe the time is lapsing and all is not clear

The time remains my final warning

The choice is yours be it peace or mourning

My message is simple to all of those in the light, unite and live to win the fight

Loss of life will continue to those that remain divided and those that remain apart

My message finished now let the sorting start

With the hat finished McGonagall looked down at her list and said the first name, "Mackenzie Abbot."

Harry turned to Hermione and said, "That wasn't a very specific song this year, was it?"

Hermione frowned as she looked down at the transcribed version of the song and went over its verses once again. After a moment she sighed and said, "The first verse might be worth remembering but everything else is a rehash of last year's song."

Harry nodded thoughtfully as they spent the remainder of the sorting guessing where each respective person would be sorted. The entirety of the Durmstrang transfers were sorted into Slytherin filling many of the empty spots vacated the previous year. They were both so focused on the sorting that they forgot to look up at the staff table until Dumbledore stood to make his announcements at the end of the feast.

The old wizard looked uncharacteristically tired for the beginning of the term feast, but Harry silently hoped he would look as good if he lived to be so old, finally the Dumbledore announced, "I wish to welcome you all back for another year at Hogwarts. As always the forbidden forest is out of bounds and a student may only enter it with the presence and permission of a professor. As many of you are aware we have two new faculty members this year. Replacing Professor Binns, who has remained as a consultant in the library, is Professor Vance. The new Defense against the Dark Arts professor is a relation of mine on loan from the Salem Institute in America. Please welcome Professor Stephen Dumbledore."

Harry curiously looked at the middle aged wizard who had auburn hair much like Harry had seen on the headmaster back when he used the diary in second year and also the diary the headmaster had given him for his birthday a couple of years earlier. He was tall and slim like the headmaster but didn't have long hair or a beard like his elder. In fact, he had a neatly trimmed goatee and by his demeanor Harry had to guess that he was an auror before his professorship.

Harry's musings were abruptly ended as he heard the headmaster finish his speech, "Fifth year prefects will escort all first year students to their respective common rooms and use the designated passwords. Good night and I hope you have a good year." Little did anyone in the castle know, but the night would be the beginning of anything but a good year for the people of wizarding Britain.

Creevy Household, Manchester England 8pm

"Stupid little muggles; you haff no idea of vhat pain is. But, allow my associates to educate you." Spoke the obviously foreign man to a terrified Steve and Cindy Creevy. The man, if that is what you could call him, was dressed in the robes of a dementor and his face was concealed in the darkness of his hood and by some outward manifestation of his obviously dark soul.

Steve Creevy had already had the skin of his body peeled away, but was being kept alive by magic just so he could watch his wife be raped for the sixth time in the last half an hour. When the final robed man had finished his turn and proceeded to slit the terrified woman's throat the leader of the group snarled and said, "I do so hate to filthy

my hands on muggle trash. But, if ye must then let us enjoy our spoils."

The six dark robed men apparated away and in the place of the dark mark was the new symbol of Voldemort's terror movement, a blood red serpent with a scythe floating over its head. The war had taken a new direction and the night had just begun.

Fletchley Manor, Dover England 9 pm

An obviously distressed balding man in what appeared to be a servant's clothes said, "Master and Madam we have your car running in the back. We must leave now if you wish to live."

Adam Fletchley frowned but nodded as he escorted his wife down the hidden staircase that led to the rear entrance and safety. The couple piled into the car before Moira Finch-Fletchley gasped as she watched their house go up in flames. The Rolls Royce sped off into the night, the family fortunate to escape with their lives.

Hogwarts, Gryffindor Common Room 9 pm

Harry and Hermione were cuddled in the mostly empty common room, their only co-occupants fellow sixth and seventh years enjoying the quiet before the year began. Harry smiled as Hermione read her notes on the possibility of imbuing their animagus forms with some magical abilities when he hissed in pain as the faded scar on his forehead truly erupted for the first time in a long while. Hermione quickly hopped from Harry's lap and plaintively asked, "What is it Harry?"

Rubbing his forehead he spoke through gritted teeth, "We need to see Dumbledore now, love."

Headmaster's Office

In a near sprint Harry and Hermione reached the headmaster's office not at all surprised to find the gargoyle slid aside awaiting their and other's arrivals. They burst into the room not surprised to find it rather full as Harry rasped out, "Sir, my scar."

Dumbledore didn't appear any more perturbed by the news, and he merely nodded before he gravely addressed the room, "I have

received word of a series of attacks against the families of muggleborn students this evening. While I do not have specifics, I believe that Voldemort's followers are restarting the hostilities. One such follower was captured following a shirt skirmish outside of the Tonks' household. Based upon this information we must also hazard to find any graduated muggleborns and seek them out to find if they have been attacked. At this point, we have no further information but the prophet should prove to be enlightening tomorrow morning. I fear tomorrow morning will be a black time indeed for the wizarding world."

Dumbledore turned to Harry and Hermione and softly said, "The Creevy's household was struck and their mother was repeatedly raped before having her throat slit. Their father was skinned alive and forced to watch the rape before he bled out. Seeing as how you are the unofficial leaders of your house, I wish to impress the importance of your support to young Dennis and Colin during this time." Harry and Hermione had paled considerably at the headmaster's words and could only nod in response.

Upon exiting the office Hermione wrapped her arms around Harry and began to sob softly into his shoulder. Harry smiled sadly and picked her up around her knees as he carried his distraught fiancé back to the common room for a talk, seeing as how neither would be getting any sleep the night before the first day of classes.

After they reached the common room Harry sat down on the couch and gently pried Hermione's face from his shoulder before he said, "I know love, I know."

Hermione sniffed once before she said, "Oh Harry, I was just thinking about what could have happened if my mum and dad weren't at you know where. Then I felt so guilty for being happy when Dennis and Colin's parents were killed and they hadn't been as lucky."

Harry frowned for a moment in thought before a helpful image of how he was the previous year when Remus and Sirius had been captured slid into his consciousness helping him into the proper frame of mind. He gently wiped a stray tear from Hermione's face before he said, "I understand Hermione, and trust me it's a very human thing to do." Harry sighed before he continued, "We have to consider ourselves lucky and help those that weren't as lucky. I have

a feeling we'll be doing it a lot before this is all over." Hermione smiled wanly at Harry before she nodded and curled into his chest as they chatted the rest of the night about what they needed to do for the rest of the year.

Ministry of Magic, Minister's Office September 2nd 3 am

Amos Diggory was having a night of hell as his aurors had taken minimum casualties in an attempt to end what turned into a night of terror throughout Britannia. They had managed to capture one man from a group who were attacking a muggleborn's family in downtown London. Unfortunately the man had gone into a near catatonic shock after he was administered Verisateum in his interrogation, and the only thing he could say afterwards was, "The Reapers... .death." The man had no discernible identity, and his picture didn't show up on the international lists of criminals either.

In short, he had a man who was basically a vegetable and as good as already been kissed by a dementor in the process. The preliminary numbers showed roughly forty dead in the most gruesome manners, with a new symbol for Voldemort's third reign of terror; the Reapers: Voldemort's new torture squad.

Hogwarts, The Great Hall September 2nd 7 am

Harry and Hermione managed a two hour nap early in the morning to recharge their batteries before they washed up and prepared for their first day of classes and the tragedy that was about to be unveiled to the rest of the school.

All of the staff looked as grim as Harry had ever seen them and McGonagall softly spoke as she handed them their schedules for the year, "These are your schedules for the next two years. You'll notice that your N.E.W.T. level classes are all in double blocks leaving Fridays open for homework. Unfortunately or fortunately for the two of you, the apprenticeships you have accepted will be dealt with on Friday mornings with private sessions with your mastership instructor."

McGonagall's face softened before she continued, "The next several days will be very rough for students in the school and I have no doubts that many people will began to flee the isles in an attempt to

get away from the dark lord. However, Hogwarts will remain open much as it has in the past even in times of war."

Harry and Hermione almost simultaneously dropped their heads to the table in an attempt to gather any hidden strength they could get for the day before they looked at their nearly identical schedules: (Go to portkey to view schedule)

The great hall slowly began to fill and the heavy fog of something terrible could simply be felt by anyone not completely oblivious. Immediately the owls began to flock down upon the hall, some with the day's papers and some with dreaded black envelopes that only the staff and two apprentices knew what they meant.

Each house aside from Slytherin immediately played home to several sobbing students and it appeared that Hufflepuff had been hit the hardest amongst the younger students. Colin immediately sought out his younger brother and they collapsed into each other's arms. Harry and Hermione shared a brief look before they approached the two brothers and offered their condolences and any help they could give.

The entire seemed to pull together as Dumbledore announced special dispensations to anyone who lost someone in the previous night's violence. The headlines of the prophet blazed as the picture of the front page was of the new mark now referred to as the red death. While Dumbledore desperately wanted to cancel classes for the day at the very least, he also knew that it would be a more powerful gesture to attend class and not allow the reaper's actions hold any more sway over their lives.

Nearly half of those in the great hall were taking the special dispensation but most of the older students marched off to their first classes of the day.

Potions classroom, Dungeons 8:50 am

Harry and Hermione walked into Slughorn's classroom surprised to find the classroom empty. Typically the room would be filled with other students but with a gasp of realization Hermione said, "Oh there must not be many people who got their owl in potions."

Harry shrugged as they took their typical seats at the front of the room and began to page through his potions book in an attempt to pass the time. The classroom filled slowly, with mostly Ravenclaws and Slytherins the only exception being Susan, who wished to become an auror and needed the class. Neville had opted against potions because like Harry and Hermione he had accepted an apprenticeship although his was with Professor Sprout and didn't require him to take his least favorite subject even without Snape.

Mathias who happened to be at the top of the class with Harry and Hermione joined them at the front of the class in Ron's old place and they quietly discussed their class schedules for the coming year.

Finally, Slughorn walked into the room and arched his eyebrow at the sight of Terry Boot sitting in the back of the room, while he had sat towards the front the previous year. Slughorn cautiously asked, "Mr. Boot, you are aware that this class is much smaller than the one you attended last year, correct?"

Draco frowned but nodded as he picked up his book and joined the other nine students in the class towards the front. Harry arched his eyebrow and commented, "I thought potions was Terry's favorite subject?"

Mathias furrowed his brow and replied, "Yeah he has been a bit strange so far last night and now this morning. Terry was always a rather talkative bloke at least with the other guys in our year. But he barely said two words last night and that was just to confirm that he was going out with Ginny Weasley."

Hermione bit her lip and quietly added, "Harry and I ran into him on the train and he looked frightened of us for a split second before he smiled. It was rather strange actually."

While the three DA members puzzled over Terry Boot, Slughorn quickly grabbed the potions ingredients for the day's class and wrote the directions on the small blackboard by his desk. Upon finishing Slughorn who looked like he had been crying much like many others that morning said, "Next week we'll be doing a brief review session from last year. Today however, we're going to have a competition of sorts to determine who our best brewer is. The directions on the board are for a restricted love potion known as Amortentia. Unlike other love potions Amortentia creates new feelings in the person

imbibing instead of enhancing feelings like all other love potions do. You will find that upon completing the potion it will give off the odor of present or enduring passion. The individual who I deem to have brewed the best potion will receive a small vial of Felix Felicis, which many of you recognize as a good luck potion. You have until 11:45 to hand in your final product."

As the three began their potion preparations Draco did the same all the while keeping a safe distance from Harry and Hermione. By ten everyone who had a clue was watching their cauldrons bubble and stirring the potions as prescribed. The three friends were quietly discussing the attacks with the aid of privacy charms as Mathias murmured, "I got an owl from my dad and he told me that over 40 dead and all either muggleborns or muggleborn families. Apparently they managed to capture one of them, but when they administered Verisateum it fried the wanker's brain."

Hermione made a reproachful sound although the two boys could tell her heart wasn't in it as she thoughtfully asked, "Did your dad say if the prisoner had the mark?"

Mathias frowned but replied, "No he didn't. Maybe you guys can ask at the next order meeting?"

Harry nodded as he stirred his potion in a clockwise direction carefully adjusting the temperature before he said, "I'll talk to Dumbledore the next time I get a chance. I'm sure he'll know something about it." The other two nodded as they watched their potions take on differing shades of the requisite mother-of-pearl sheen. Steam spiraled above the potions and when Harry leaned in to a whiff he smiled as he smelt parchment, strawberries much like Hermione's shampoo, and a hint of broom polish that reminded Harry of all of the flying lessons he had given her.

Hermione eyes Harry as a fond smile came to his face before she leaned down and smelt her potion, which smelled of freshly mown grass, a hint of Harry's spicy cologne, and an even a trace of treacle tart.

Based upon the dreamy expression on Mathias' face his potion reminded him very much of Luna, or at least her essence. After they bottled their potions and placed their labels on them they placed them before Slughorn. The balding wizard looked them over for a

length of time before he jotted down a few notes and began to mark everyone else's potions as they were handed in. Slughorn didn't say a word the entire time until Terry Boot stepped forward and handed in a vial filled with a thick pink substance.

The potions master looked up from the potion and said, "Mr. Boot, this is far below your usual standards. Today's potions are not graded, but I expect your other efforts will be better or I will have to drop you from the class." Harry, Hermione, and Mathias shared a look and each made mental notes to keep an eye on Terry Boot in an attempt to explain his change.

Draco was biting his lip so hard that he tasted a hint of copper, indicating he had broken his lip with his nervous gnawing. Deciding to nip this situation in the bud he softly asked, "Professor Slughorn, would it be possible to get some private instruction until my work is back up to standard? I'm kind of having a bad day, I'm sure you can understand that given the circumstances." Slughorn sympathetically nodded and jotted down a time on a slip of parchment for his instruction.

After going back over his notes Slughorn stood and announced, "After careful consideration I am pleased to announce the winner of the competition is Ms. Granger of Gryffindor house. There were other very good attempts, which bode well for the remainder of this class." Slughorn produced a vial filled with a golden liquid from his robe pockets and handed it to Hermione before he added, "Felix Felicis is a very rare potion, and you must use it only in the direst of times." Hermione merely smiled and cast an unbreakable charm on the vial before she threw it in her bag as the class was dismissed for lunch.

Hogwarts, The Great Hall 12 pm

The great hall was still a very somber place during lunch despite the fact that it was less than half filled compared to its usual occupancy. Many students had taken their dispensation to leave and do preparations for burials for their family members, and many others left to spend time with their remaining family members, be it through cousins or some other relation.

Dumbledore walked up to the Gryffindor table and asked, "Mr. Potter and Ms. Granger, would you care to join me for lunch in my office

before your defense class?" Harry and Hermione wearily nodded, all at once feeling the events of the day weigh down on them. Dumbledore merely smiled and sat a phoenix feather on the table and said, "At your soonest leisure touch the feather, we have much to discuss."

Meanwhile over at the Slytherin table Theodore Nott Jr. was plotting with his pack of hyenas in an attempt to get Potter and his mudblood and ingratiate himself with the dark lord.

Nott watched Dumbledore walk over to the Gryffindor table with a scowl on his face before he turned to Pansy and said, "The only way we can get to Potter and his bitch is by attacking his friends first. The question is which one of his friends is the weakest?"

Pansy sneered as Crabbe Goyle stuffed their faces before she replied, "The little bint in Ravenclaw. She's too spacey to be too much of a threat Teddy."

Nott smirked as he glanced over at the Ravenclaw table, before he maliciously said, "Yes, that'll work nicely."

### Headmaster's Office

Harry and Hermione touched the feather and were promptly deposited in their two usual chairs in the headmaster's office. Dumbledore was sitting in his chair, apparently having taken an alternate form of transportation.

Hermione had a sly smile on her face before she said, "Professor I wasn't aware an astral projection could carry tangible objects."

Dumbledore chuckled briefly before he replied, "It is a new twist I've added on the art. Perhaps some other time I will discuss it in length. But, for now I wish to discuss the new defense professor, my great nephew. He has agreed to come to Hogwarts and teach on the proviso that he work with the two of you on something akin to a student's league of aurors."

Harry looked baffled for once and asked, "What?"

Dumbledore smiled although it was fleeting before he replied, "The defense group you held last year was initially meant to be open to all students, correct?"

Harry nodded and Dumbledore continued, "What Steven proposes is a school wide group that would teach every student who participates will receive the necessary defensive skills to survive an attack on their persons."

Harry looked at Hermione for a moment sharing a brief mental conversation before he nodded at her and turned back to Dumbledore replying, "We can do that sir, but we only have time for a four hour meeting once a month. Anything more and the other Professor Dumbledore will have to do it."

The headmaster nodded as they ate their lunch in companionable silence for a long period. Finally, Dumbledore said, "Steven was a master auror in the southern squadron of what the Americans call the M.B.I. or magical bureau of investigations. You may find him an excellent source of experience albeit in a marginally brash form."

Harry chuckled as house elves cleaned up their dishes before he replied, "Americans have the right of it sir. Why waste time being polite when you can get right to the point."

Dumbledore's eyes twinkled as he watched the two stand to leave before his parting shot, "I believe that Steven will like you very much Harry. Have a fun class."

Harry and Hermione exited the headmaster's office and were halfway down the hallway when Harry groaned and said, "I don't think I can handle two Dumbledores in the castle Hermione."

Hermione giggled and replied, "Somehow I think you'll manage Potter."

A/N: Ah another chapter for my faithful reviewers. Next chapter we deal with Steven Dumbledore and some fall out from the attack of the reapers. Nott makes a move and we get to know Vladimir better too. Draco and Ginny have a date, or should I say Terry and Ginny?

Lots of plotlines going around at the moment, hold on for the ride as they tie together, and don't forget Moldieshorts is still around.

Thanks to all of you that have reviewed, and keep up the good work.

Disclaimer: I don't own the rights to any of it and lord knows I've tried. I'll always remember the time I drank that Felix Felicis and almost got it all. Of course after I awoke in the hospital I realized it was transmission fluid for my car not a magical potion, and that everything I saw was a hallucination, but success is a relative thing. Read and enjoy!

A/N: I know I didn't mention this anywhere, but how did everyone like my sorting hat song? I'm pretty sure it rhymed everywhere and I didn't even get a headache in the process.

Defense Against the Dark Arts Office September 8th 11pm

Steven Dumbledore was sitting on the edge of the windowsill overlooking the grounds as he sipped from his glass of wine. While he was outwardly silent, his mind was churning as he thought about what his great uncle wanted him to do the coming year. It was a little startling being asked to help the next great wizard and witch fulfill their destinies if his uncle died. In a way he was a morbid back up plan, which was disconcerting on its own.

With another sip he began to think about Potter and his fiancé and their relative strengths and weaknesses based upon the reports he received from the attack on the ministry the previous year. Potter was a warrior through and through, he could use his magic in creative and lethal ways, and from his uncle's description his work with the blade was coming along quickly. Granger was an entirely different case, she had the power but lacked the killer instinct, which he could attest to as a former auror wasn't a bad thing unless constantly in battle. They were both brilliant and knowledgeable as he could attest to from his first class with them nearly a week earlier.

Flashback

Harry and Hermione entered the defense classroom that had been host to a wide variety of professors over the past five years. They took their seats at the front of the classroom and covertly pulled their wands from their holsters under the table.

Steven Dumbledore entered his classroom with a slight smirk on his face at the anxious expressions on the majority of the students. The one thing about being a new professor was that he could scare his students. He never noticed as a couple of wand flicks elongated his

hair and goatee until he was a look alike of their headmaster. As Steven turned to begin his speech he had practiced to scare the students he didn't get the reaction he had been expecting, the entire class erupted into laughter aside from Harry and Hermione who had the most innocent expressions on their face he had ever seen, a dead giveaway to the perpetrators of the deed.

Rather than changing his hair and beard back Steven merely gave the two Gryffindor's a jaunty salute before he began to lecture on advanced shielding charms. Little did he know how much respect he earned on that first day by that simple gesture.

Taking another sip of his wine he sighed as he watched the giant squid wave a tentacle out of the water before splashing back down. After a moment he muttered aloud, "Albus better know what he's talking about."

Gryffindor Common Room 4 am September 9th

Harry was sitting in his and Hermione's favorite chair, alone for once as he absently fingered his unspeakable badge. He and Hermione had been promoted to full field agents with their own independent agenda. The unspeakable badge represented his life in so many different ways. First, of course the badge was magical. Anytime an unspeakable flashed their badge the person who saw it would have a selective memory spell cast upon them that wouldn't allow them to divulge the unspeakables identity. One such example of this came last year when they had flashed their badges to Kingsley Shacklebolt during the battle at the ministry.

Next, the badge represented the secrecy in his personal matters that had become such a big part of his life in recent years. Having secrets, Harry found, accumulated quickly on one's conscience and often led to sleepless nights or at the very least shortened sleep at times. To say Harry hated secrets at this point would be an understatement, but he also realized that some things couldn't be shared publicly for safety reasons. He was grateful at the very least that he held no secrets of consequence from Hermione, which if nothing else allowed him to get any sleep at night at all.

Harry pocketed his badge as he began to think about the first week of school, and any potential threats from within the walls. Nott had been quiet, but Harry realized it was only a matter of time before that

would change and the Slytherin would have to be roughly put back in his place.

Oh what could be made of Vladimir and the rest of the transfer students from Durmstrang? Harry wasn't an idiot, the transfers coincided with the immigration of the reapers to Britain, and that was too big of coincidence for him to ignore. With a chuckle to himself he realized that at some point in his meanderings he had begun to channel Mad-Eye. Taking one last glance he closed his eyes hoping to catch a little extra sleep before classes started for the second week.

Hogwarts the Great Hall September 9th 8 am

The first Hogsmeade weekend of the year was still two weeks away but Draco wasn't taking any chances with something as major as asking Ginny to go with him. Draco certainly wasn't the only one setting up dates for the weekend and as he approached the Slytherin table he tapped on Ginny's shoulder and tentatively said, "Um, hey Ginny."

Ginny looked up from her charms text and gave him a beatific smile that did strange things to his stomach before she said, "Hey Terry, how are classes going?"

Draco smiled slightly and with a shrug replied, "I'm doing alright so far, but they call them N.E.W.T. level for a reason."

Ginny nodded and then shyly asked, "So what else can I help you with Terry?"

Draco smiled and asked, "Would you like to go to Hogsmeade with me?"

Ginny nodded and sweetly said, "That sounds lovely Terry."

Draco exhaled a breath and nodded before he turned to leave and said, "I'm looking forward to it Ginny. I'll talk to you later, ok?" Ginny merely nodded with a happy smile and went back to reading her charms textbook.

Draco sat down heavily at the Ravenclaw table and rubbed at his eyes tiredly. He had already messed up a few times and it had only

been a week. The thing that really bothered him now was that his designs on avenging his father truly seemed to be outweighed by how comfortable he was becoming in Terry Boot's life. Draco knew it couldn't last, and he had actually begun a fall back plan if he ever totally went against his mission from the dark lord. Draco knew that he'd need a powerful ally and only one name came to mind that would give him of all people a second chance, Albus Dumbledore the very man he was charged with finding a way to kill.

Taking a big sip of his pumpkin juice Draco went over his potions notes once again, hoping to avoid a repeat of the previous week, and to remain safely off the radar of those who really mattered. Draco groaned as he reread the magical properties dragon scales before he buried his face in his hands, suddenly he wished he had actually worked for his grade in potions instead of accepting Snape's charity as he had in the past.

Defense Against the Dark Arts, Hogwarts 4:55 pm

"Alright you troublemakers, that's enough for today." The students all quickly began to put away all of the dueling mats as their professor continued, "Remember I want a foot on your observations of the *Contego Maxima* shielding charm versus the standard *Protego* shielding charm." The students began to pack up their things when Steven Dumbledore added, "Potter, Granger if you could stay after class for a moment." Harry and Hermione shared a look as they finished packing their bags but did as requested.

Steven or Steve to his friends addressed the pair as they sat in their chairs from class with expectant looks on their faces, "I don't know how much my uncle has told you, but we're supposed to be working on a little project this year. I am well aware of the little defense militant group you ran last year. Uncle Albus wants and I agree that the three of us should do something similar although on a smaller scale. I personally was blown away at several of the exercises my uncle described that your group did. What we need to do is tone that down enough so that first and second years can grasp some of the defensive material while the older students can still learn perhaps some counter attacks to what these 'reapers' might attempt to do."

Harry and Hermione shared a quick look, carrying a brief mental conversation before Hermione turned to him and said, "We'll work on a syllabus of some sort and have it ready by Friday Professor."

Steve nodded before he said, "You know, this Voldemort or whatever nonsense he's called here is referred to as Tom Riddle in all of our papers."

Hermione looked intrigued before she asked, "Are there many dark lords in the history of the states?"

Steve shook his head in the negative and replied, "Nah, there are too many different opinions between the dark wizards in the U.S. Usually the dark factions battle between each other more than anything else. They all want supremacy, but they aren't smart enough to organize without fighting. This Riddle character is more opportunistic than the typical dark wizard type. From what I've gathered, he reminds me of that muggle Hitler guy."

Harry nodded thoughtfully before he replied, "In a way he kind of is, although Hitler reveled in the limelight and he had a very public persona. From what I've gathered from my readings, Voldemort strikes me more as Stalin type."

Steve shrugged before he stroked his beard and said, "Ah I guess it doesn't really matter anyways. All that does matter is we kill the bastard and save as many people as we can in the process."

Hermione frowned and stated, "But if we become callous and unfeeling as he is in the process, it won't matter."

Steve chuckled and said, "Oh you Brits, everything is either blooming hilarious or tragic isn't it."

Harry shrugged and with a hint of anger replied, "When you've grown up in this mess it's a bit harder to worry about other things I guess Professor."

Steve arched an eyebrow before he muttered, "I'll keep that in mind lad. But, when we aren't in class call me Steve, never in a million years did I think I'd ever be a professor."

Harry smiled in response as they both stood before he replied, "We'll remember that Steve. Thanks for taking the time to talk." Steve merely nodded as they exited the class before he closed the door and with a flick of his wand summoned a scotch on the rocks from a

hidden spot on a book case. He took a long swig before he added to himself, "I'm gonna need a valium if these Brits don't relax some."

### Care of Magical Creatures, September 12th 3 pm

The N.E.W.T level Care of Magical Creatures' class was in many ways a blow off class to those that weren't going into the Ministry department for creatures. However, in many ways it was much more interesting to Harry and Hermione than it had been any year before.

On this particular day Professor Grubbly-Plank was showing the class, or at the very least attempting to explain Thestrals. Only two students in the class had any idea what the beasts looked like aside from the Professor and they were towards the back of the group cuddling and trying to steal kisses from each other. With a flash of fire their moment of fun ended as Fawkes dropped a letter into Harry's waiting hand, trained by necessity of time if nothing else.

Harry sighed heavily as he unrolled the parchment:

Howler and Athena,

I apologize for interrupting an important activity, but necessity dictates that you must meet me in my office right now. Please tap your wands on the parchment to activate it as a portkey to my office.

Papa Phoenix

Nobody noticed as the class was suddenly short two of its students, as Harry and Hermione vanished in a swirl of red and gold en route back to the Headmaster's office.

### Headmaster's Office, September 12th 3:05 pm

Harry and Hermione landed softly into a couple of chairs on either side of Dumbledore as he addressed a large group including the order of the phoenix, and a few leaders from the auror squadrons of the ministry.

Dumbledore merely smiled at their entrance and said, "Ah welcome, now we can get down to business."

Dumbledore stood from his chair and with a flick of his wand a floating three dimensional image appeared of a very large manor. Dumbledore began to speak much as a general leading his armies into a war, "The target you see now is Lestrange Manor. Our intelligence places nearly twenty of the reapers at this residence along with Bellatrix Lestrange. If we can neutralize this target then a shift in the tide of the war can be accomplished."

Dumbledore flicked his wand as the image shifted to a cross section with two areas glowing red as he continued, "The two highlighted areas you can see are our two sites of infiltration. I will be leading alpha team in site one while auror Scrimgeour will be leading Beta team with the rear offensive. You all have been briefed already on the logistics of the mission."

Harry looked confused for a moment before he asked, "Why are we here sir?"

Dumbledore flicked his wand as the image disappeared before he said, "The rest of you are dismissed, Harry and Hermione please stay behind for a moment."

The room full of people slowly filed out leaving the three most powerful witches and wizards in the entirety of the school. Dumbledore sighed and said, "While I am away it is up to you to make sure the castle remains safe. The wards will hold to anything but a direct assault. I am well aware that our offensive will prompt a counter at one of two places, here at Hogwarts or the ministry building. If you are called to action at the ministry you have my consent to do so. But please, inform Minerva of your actions so she can take the necessary precautions."

Harry and Hermione felt the lead weight of the war fall upon their shoulders at Dumbledore's statements but they both nodded their agreement before they were dismissed.

Lestrange Manor, Outside of Dover September 12th 7 pm

The assorted assault force members comprised equally of Order members and ministry aurors were standing just outside of the anti-apparition wards to Lestrange Manor. One of the benefits of having captured Rabastan Lestrange was that as a member of the family he could reveal the Manor's unplottable location. Over the course of the

past month Ministry aurors were undercover as muggle bird watchers keeping dibs on the movements around the Manor. With that in mind it was a certainty that at the very least a few reapers were present at any given time.

Dumbledore looked over the assembled group dressed in various black assault robes before he said, "We will have at the most twenty minutes to get into the manor. Merlin help us all."

With those words the aurors took off at a run towards the rear entrance to the wards as Dumbledore sighed before he raised his wand and made several intricate passes as he mutter long lines of Latin. The wards flashed into vision for a moment before they flickered out. Dumbledore took a deep breath and said, "We must get inside of the wards now, before they reconstitute."

Everyone scurried inside of the wards as Dumbledore labored across feeling rather exhausted after manipulating the wards of such a large area. After a moment Tonks watched as a messenger spell landed next to her as it said, "Beta inside of wards. Awaiting orders to move in."

Dumbledore nodded as Tonks sent out her Patronus, an interesting looking canine of some sort, with the message. A moment later Dumbledore nodded as the Order closed in on the front entrance of the large Manor.

As they got within sight range of their entrance a bright red light flashed on alerting those inside of intruders. A moment later a messenger spell reached Tonks as spellfire began to flash amidst the early dusk light. Five more reapers ran from the entrance and entrenched themselves as they returned fire. The messenger spell finally played its recorded message, "We're taking heavy losses, and Head auror Scrimgeour is dead. We are ordering a general retreat. Repeat we have taken 10 casualties, the enemy has taken roughly as many."

Dedalus Diggle paled as he returned fire before he turned to Dumbledore and said, "Albus, we've taken no casualties yet, but the aurors are taking heavy losses. We've taken out at least fifteen of them, we should fall ba-." The rest of Diggle's response was lost to the ages as a yellow bolt snapped out of the night leaving a gaping hole where his forehead had been a moment earlier.

Dumbledore frowned as another friend fell in the war, before he called out, "General retreat." The order slowly maneuvered back to the edge of the wards as Sirius was last to leave making sure to address his cousin's estate with a one-fingered salute.

Ministry of Magic, September 12th 7:15 pm

Arthur and Percy Weasley were fighting back to back as they guarded the door to Minister Diggory's office. A force of twenty five aurors was evenly split between the two corridors leading to the minister of magic's office. Seeing that the aurors were slowly losing the battle Arthur Weasley turned to the door and yelled, "Amos, alert the unspeakables that we need reinforcements."

Amos Diggory sighed as he sat at his desk flicking his wand to activate emergency protocol for an attack upon the ministry. A rescue message would be sent to all certified unspeakables, detailing the location of their rendezvous point, which was directly outside of the minister's office.

Hogwarts, Headmaster's Office 7:18 pm

"Mr. Potter, while I appreciate the danger we all could be in right now, your pacing benefits nobody in the least." Minerva McGonagall exasperatedly said to the pacing wizard in front of her.

Harry turned to reply when he felt his badge let off a vibration. His eyes widened as he remembered emergency protocol and with a glance to Hermione he grabbed one of the knick knacks on Dumbledore's desk as he muttered "portus". McGonagall's eyes widened and Hermione quickly said, "Attack on the minister we're being called in. The castle is yours professor." With Hermione's parting shot the two student unspeakables vanished in a flash of gold light, as the castle was light two more warriors of the light.

Ministry of Magic 7:20 pm

Harry and Hermione arrived in a flash of light startling the two Weasleys that we are the moment the last line of defense for the minister. Arthur's eyebrow reached the tips of his forehead as he incredulously said, "Harry, Hermione you're unspeakables?"

Harry looked at Arthur and Percy, who looked like he had bitten into something very bitter and very sour, before he flashed his badge effectively protecting his position along with his fiancé's. Harry frowned in thought before he asked, "What's the situation?"

Arthur shook his head in an attempt to wrap his mind around the new tidbit before he replied, "The reapers are focusing their attacks more on the right corridor, although there are some in the left corridor."

Harry turned to Hermione before he said, "Hermione, you clean out the left corridor and when you're done come and help me in the right."

Harry unsheathed Gryffindor's sword as he pulled his holly wand and took off at a run down to the right corridor and into the fighting. Hermione sighed as she pulled both of her wands and ran down the left corridor just as other unspeakables finally began to arrive.

Ministry of Magic 8:30 pm

Harry and Hermione were tired but not exhausted as they watched the last of the captured reapers rounded up and placed into the confinement cells of the ministry. Harry turned towards Amos Diggory and asked, "Have we gotten any confirmation on losses for the night?"

Amos tiredly replied, "In terms of total numbers the losses weren't particularly excessive. But, we did lose Amelia Bones and Rufus Scrimgeour. I believe Dedalus Diggle was the only one lost from the order in the fighting at Lestrange Manor. A total of twenty aurors were killed and the entire MLE will need to be restaffed. I've thought of asking Mad-Eye to return and take Amelia's position. But, those I admit have only been thoughts. I'm afraid anything more will have to be left until tomorrow."

Harry appeared pained to ask but did so anyways, "How many reapers were accounted for dead or captured altogether?"

Arthur pulled a piece of parchment from his pocket before he replied, "There were 10 confirmed dead at Lestrange Manor and perhaps as many as five more that were mortally injured. Here at the ministry they only brought twenty and still managed to get within about 200

meters of the minister. They are excellent fighters, which means that any number of them is dangerous. Ten dead and ten captured from that force Harry."

Harry grasped Hermione around her waist and pulled her near before he tiredly said, "War is hell." With that the pair vanished as Harry reactivated the portkey from before, sending them back to Hogwarts to prepare for another day of school.

Amos turned to Arthur and said, "I want you to do everything you can to keep those two going through this war Arthur. I am well aware of the issues your youngest two children had with them, but it is your job to make sure that when all of this is over that we don't have an even more powerful dark lord and lady taking Riddle's place because we dropped the quaffle."

Hogwarts, September 21st Saturday 9:00 am

Both Voldemort and the followers of the light were still nursing their losses as over a week had passed since the battle of attrition had began in earnest once again. No one was counting, but of the ten dead at the ministry Harry was responsible for two and Hermione was responsible for two.

But this morning was about celebrating the things that they were fighting for, a Hogsmeade weekend one of the last venues where the specter of Voldemort had yet to taint. While Harry and Hermione were riding in one of the front carriages, a far less glamorous couple were riding in the furthest back carriage as Ginny Weasley and her date Terry Boot sat cuddled.

Draco was stroking Ginny's hair as she leaned her head against his shoulder as she said, "Terry, have you thought about what you want to do when you're all done at Hogwarts?"

Draco wryly thought, "Terry Boot won't be doing a whole lot of anything aside from vegging out." Instead Draco replied, "I don't know, hearing how Michael's younger brother and his mum were killed that night. I guess I'll worry more about surviving until graduation and maybe making sure you're around to be there with me."

Ginny sadly replied, "It's all so terrible isn't it. It's hard to even dream any more without worrying if you'll wake up the next morning." The diminutive witch sniffed and said, "Promise me we'll at least be friends forever Terry?"

Draco sighed as he stroked her hair for a long moment before he replied, "I promise that I will be there for you forever. But, I think it's highly unlikely you'll want me around when you figure me out."

Ginny pulled away slightly to look into Draco's eyes before she said, "You want to know how I know I'll never leave you?"

Draco stiffened slightly and with a hint of trepidation asked, "How do you know that?"

Ginny smiled as she caressed his cheek and said, "It's in your eyes. Even if you were the vilest person in the world, which you're not, your eyes give you away Terry."

Draco swallowed thickly and quietly asked, "My eyes?"

Ginny nodded as she leaned in and said, "There are a lot of feelings in your eyes I haven't figured out yet Terry, but none of them are evil or scary. Your heart is in the right place Terry; you'll find your way."

Draco merely nodded as another piece of his resistance against Ginny Weasley fell away leaving him more exposed than he had ever felt in his life. The part that truly scared him was that recent development that he wanted her to see the real person he actually was.

A/N: Hey look at this another chapter. Well, the plot thickens as Draco slips further from his path and Ginny slips further into love.

The war is already taking a toll on Harry and Hermione, and you'll see how next chapter. We have a check in with Ickle Ronniekins, a Dumbledore family reunion of sorts, and yes we check in with the marauders!

Thanks to all of you that have reviewed, and thanks for reading.

Disclaimer: It's JKR's not mine. I don't claim ownership to any of the characters, settings, plot ideas, or other material.

A/N: Starting next chapter the changes will begin to accumulate from the original version.

Hogwarts, Tuesday October 1st 8 am

It had been nearly a week and a half since the raid on Lestrange Manor, and the attack on the Ministry of Magic. In a way it was calm, but not the peaceful calm of a world with everything in order, but merely the calm between battles in a long an oppressive war.

Harry and Hermione were enjoying a quiet breakfast in the great hall as they read the morning edition of the prophet. Something had been bothering Harry for a few weeks, and for once, he had managed to keep it a secret from Hermione. This particular morning however, Harry needed to tell someone as he watched Vladimir enter the hall with his fellow transfers from Durmstrang.

Sighing heavily he murmured, "Hermione love, have you noticed anything strange about Vladimir and his friends?"

With a small smile Hermione smugly replied, "I've been waiting for you to say something about that. You think that just because you are blocking your feelings on the link that I can't figure out what you're thinking? Harry, I've had four and a half years of experience figuring out your actions. That isn't going to go away because we're engaged."

Harry managed a sheepish grin as she continued, "I'm pretty sure that Vladimir and his friends represent a group of junior reapers, while Nott is leading the junior deatheaters. Both are too proud to work together and actually accomplish something. I say we just watch and wait for them to make a move." With a nod and a frustrated sigh, Harry scanned the room for potential threats, as had become his practice of late.

Hogwarts Headmaster's Office Wednesday October 9th, 8 pm

"Uncle Albus my granddad has told me all of this already, and I understand that the times precipitated the estrangement as much as anything else." Steven tiredly said.

"I understand this nephew, but I am merely stating that I do not wish to make the mistakes of the past once again. I have alienated far too much family as it is over the years." The elder Dumbledore pleadingly said.

"Uncle Albus, I was an auror for over half of my life. I have seen the changes that have taken place in America, much like were happening in magical Britain at the same time. Did my grandfather come to your aid in the war against Grindewald? He did it because you are family, nothing more or less. The problems of the past will remain just there, in the past. A sibling disagreement from 135 years ago really doesn't matter as much as the health of a brother. You can send a letter to Grandpa Marcus yourself, if you don't believe me. Simply send it to the headmaster's office at the Magical Academy of the South. Who knows, he might even visit over the holidays."

Dumbledore removed his crescent shaped glasses and replied, "I shall do the same, and I will also invite all of my other American relatives to the castle over the holidays. I believe it is well past the time to reunify the Dumbledore family."

Steven sighed as he took a deep swig of his drink, he muttered under his breath, "When did this become such a damned soap opera?"

Ministry of Magic, Wizengamot Chambers Friday October 11th 12 pm

"On to the next order of business, confirmation for the Head of the Magical Law Enforcement branch and the head of the auror squads." Dumbledore intoned in an official tone.

Amos Diggory stood from his seat next to Dumbledore's and said, "As per my right as Minister of Magic, I nominate Alastor Moody as head of the MLE and Kingsley Shacklebolt as head of the auror squad."

Dumbledore nodded and turned to the governing body as he said, "A second for the motion is necessary to bring forth a vote."

Augusta Longbottom raised her hand and said, "I second the motion."

Dumbledore nodded as he said, "We have a second for the motion from Madam Longbottom. Now we must bring forth a motion. Scribe of the court, you must record the results and magically verify them." Percy Weasley nodded solemnly, having reached his career pinnacle, short of the Minister of Magic anyways, in his view as court scribe for the Wizengamot. Being so very close to all of the power of the British Wizarding government empowered him in a way he hadn't felt since receiving the head boy badge before his seventh year.

"All of those in favor of Alastor Moody as head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, say so now." The vast majority of the hands in the room were raised as Percy systematically counted before he uttered, "Consummo" as the numbers magically appeared on his ballot.

"All of those against the motion of Alastor Moody as head of the DMLE, say so now." Dumbledore smiled slightly as scattered hands could be seen. Percy's count went much more quickly as he finished his calculations and handed them to Dumbledore.

"The motion to appoint Alastor Moody as head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement has passed. Mr. Moody will take his position at the earliest possible time." Dumbledore intoned.

After a moment he continued, "All of those in favor of Kingsley Shacklebolt's appointment as head of the auror squad, say so now." Fewer hands were raised than for Moody, but still an overwhelming majority remained. In many ways, amongst the older sects of wizarding Britain a simmering racist faction remained that still discriminated based upon skin color. It was not terribly visible any more, but it would crop up from time to time in similar proceedings.

"All of those against the motion to appoint Kingsley Shacklebolt as head of the auror squad, say so now." Roughly one third of the hands were raised at this, and Percy scribbled away before verifying his count with the same spell.

Reading the results Dumbledore announced, "The motion to appoint Kingsley Shacklebolt head of the auror squad has passed. Mr.

Shacklebolt will take his position at the earliest possible time. Are there any further motions?" Scanning the crowd Dumbledore nodded, "I hereby declare this session of the Wizengamot ended."

Outside of Atlanta Friday October 11th 12 pm

"Weasley! If you think that this sorry excuse of whatever it was you were trying to bake will be enough to get yourself back into the general population, then you are sorely mistaken." David Andersen barked as spittle foamed from his mouth.

Ron winced and weakly said, "It was supposed to be a mincemeat pie sir."

Dave cracked a quick grin before he banished it by sheer force of will and said, "The effort in and of itself is important Weasley. You will be released back into basic training, but you will be on probation. Do not make me regret my decision."

Ron barely squashed the urge to hug the large man and settled for a quick handshake before he grinned and said, "I promise you sir, you won't regret this."

Dave walked out of the room and stroked the stubble on his chin before he said to himself, "Time will tell the story Mr. Weasley. Time will tell."

Grimmauld Place Saturday October 12th 8 pm

"Padfoot get your sorry arse down here, you and Emmy can finish whatever you've started later. We need to talk." Remus yelled up the stairs in an attempt to stop the giggles from a few floors above.

A muffled thump followed by one last round of giggles led to a few moments of silence as Remus smirked as he waited for Sirius to come down the stairs.

Slowly walking down the stairs in a pair of shorts a t-shirt and a grimace on his face; Sirius began to plan painful ways to get back his old friend who he could see fighting to keep himself from laughing out loud at the petulant expression on his own face.

Grumbling as he reached the final step he said, "This better be good Moony, I was getting into the A material up there."

Remus barked a laugh before he settled himself and said, "You know how it has been extremely quiet since the night of the raid on Lestrange Manor." Sirius nodded and Remus continued, "Whenever Riddle goes quiet during a time of war he's planning something. Without Snape we have no source of information as to what he might be planning. What do you say to trolling Knockturn Alley tomorrow in an attempt to gleam some information about something?"

Sirius ran a hand through his short but unkempt hair before he replied, "I think I can forgive you for interrupting my nocturnal activities. But, don't think that pay back won't be coming when you least expect it when getting cozy with Nymphny."

Remus grinned wolfishly and said, "Only if you can get past our locking charms mate. By the way, I'll be telling my love what you called her." Sirius groaned before he brightened and with a smirk shot back up the stairs to conclude the to be continued he had left a few minutes earlier.

Hogwarts Grounds Sunday October 13th 1 PM

Ginny Weasley's life was at the moment a very good one. She had a wonderful affectionate boyfriend, who also managed to respect her physical boundaries. She was nearly a month ahead on her OWL review, and she had also managed to fade into the background in Slytherin house, despite the fact that the previous year she had been advocating wholesale changes in the house. With the appearance of Vladimir and the other Durmstrang transfers, all of that progress had been lost.

As Ginny and Terry sat on a rock overlooking the black lake, the giant squid rolled on the water sending a spray of water at some second years at the other end of the lake.

Terry smiled, "You ever sit and ask yourself about the secrets of Hogwarts? Things like, why do we have a Whomping willow, or why is there a giant squid in the lake, or even why a castle for school aged kids is built next to a dark and dangerous forest?"

Ginny poked Terry in the ribs playfully before she replied, "Why does anyone have secrets? I think secrets protect our deepest and darkest actions that we don't want anyone else to know of."

Terry turned away from Ginny before he swallowed thickly and said, "That sounds about right."

Ginny frowned in thought before she said, "You've been happy with me, haven't you Terry?"

Terry nodded and with a tender smile said, "Happier than I ever thought possible."

Ginny smiled and said, "Then why don't we dispense with the secrets and see if we're strong enough as a couple to survive them."

Letting out a breath Terry asked, "Why don't we set a deadline then?"

Ginny nodded, "I like that idea a deadline forces us to tell our deepest secrets before we chicken out."

Terry ran a hand through his short hair and offered, "By Christmas then?"

Ginny leaned back into Terry's chest as his arms automatically wrapped around her waist before she murmured, "Christmas sounds perfect."

Room of Requirement Sunday October 13th 2 PM

"Harry, I know we do this every so often, but what do you see when you think of the future now?" Hermione queried as she was cuddled up against Harry on a couch in the room of requirement.

Harry continued his idle combing through Hermione's hair with his fingers and replied, "I think it's fair to say that being a freelance unspeakable gives us some interesting possibilities after we graduate. Of course my apprenticeship with Professor McGonagall has went very well too. I see no reason why we can't have both and still start a family at some point."

Hermione smiled and softly said, "Well I'd like to have a family with you too. But I don't think I could handle a family the size of the Weasleys. Maybe two or three kids, but definitely not any more than that."

Harry placed a kiss on top of Hermione's head before he said, "Unfortunately, we do have some obstacles to deal with before we get there love. Riddle for one, and then of course we have to take N.E.W.T's and get married. Once we finish that list, then maybe we can start picking out names."

Hermione sighed before she asked, "Nott or Vladimir are going to try something soon Harry."

With a frown Harry replied, "I know they are Hermione. But, one of the bad parts about being one of the good guys is that we can't make a move until they do first. All we can do is stay on our guard and keep an eye on them."

Hermione sighed before she spun in Harry's arms and began to kiss him passionately, a war was going on outside of the walls, but now wasn't a time to stop living. As Harry kissed the witch who ruled his world with equal passion, he was once again reminded of the power that Voldemort knew not.

Slytherin Common Room Sunday October 13th 8 PM

Vladimir Gorinski was seated in a plush chair in a secluded corner of the Slytherin common room in deep thought of what he next move would be. His task had been a simple but difficult one, find a way inside of the defenses at Hogwarts so that a full-scale reaper and deatheater attack could take place on the grounds. The problem was that it had been a month and a half and no progress had been made.

Of course he had hoped that Potter and his mudblood fiance would have given him a certain amount of latitude, and the benefit of the doubt. However, it hadn't exactly worked that way. Potter had people on the look out at every turn, and the secrets of the castle's wards were only revealed in one place, the headmaster's office.

To say his time at Hogwarts had been entirely fruitless would be a lie as well. He had made progress and managed to place some

sophisticated scrying charms in and around the headmaster's office, in an effort to find a time when he could explore the next layer of defense to his end goal. It was slow work, but the dark lord rewarded those patient enough to complete their tasks.

Slytherin Common Room Sunday October 13th 10 pm

"Teddy, when are we going to go after the Loony chit from Ravenclaw?" Pansy cooed as she rubbed Nott's shoulders.

Nott grimaced as he watched Crabbe and Goyle punch each other in the arm, before laughing like oafs when one of the duo rubbed it. With a glance at the ceiling in a plea for help he sighed before he answered the one person from his troop aside from himself with half a brain, Pansy, "The dark lord appreciates symbolic gestures. On Halloween we will strike as a reminder to Potter, that he can not look beyond the walls of the castle for enemies. He must first learn his betters within the walls. With his attention on finding the culprit of the attack, the dark lord will strike again."

Pansy batted her eyelashes and said, "That sounds like a brilliant plan Teddy." Nott smirked as Pansy proceeded to give him a public fellatio, simply for being an evil bastard. With an idle thought before his eyes rolled back up into his head, he wondered why Malfoy never received such service.

With Nott's attention elsewhere, Vladimir shook his head in contempt at anyone in the dark lord's service who could be such a buffoon as to announce plans within hearing range of other students. Perhaps the dark lord's valuation of members was a little skewed. With help like that who needed enemies, and more importantly how could you defeat them?

Unknown location in the British Isles October 14th 1 am

"My lord, we have already recouped our losses from the attack on Bella's Manor, and our siege of the ministry. Our forces grow stronger every day sir, with the new contingent of dark sorcerers from China our forces once again best the ministry and Dumbledore's order. We shall soon have access to dragons and the dementors are finally negotiating with you again." Dmitri Gorinski, son of Grindewald, announced with no small measure of pride

having been personally responsible for the recruitment of the Chinese contingent.

Voldemort smiled evilly as Bellatrix and Nagini sat on both sides of his throne, writhing in similarly disturbing manners. After a moment of thought he imperiously said, "Your efforts will be rewarded handsomely Dmitri. Tell me what news do we have of your son's attempts to find a way into the old fool's lair?"

Dmitri quickly replied, "Vladimir is patiently waiting for an opportunity to test the next level of defenses to the old fool's office. He will succeed my lord, of that much I promise."

Voldemort reached over and stroked Bella's head, which elicited a very throaty moan from her, before he said, "You have yet to fail me Dmitri. Make sure this is not the first time. Resources for this task are unlimited, because it is central to my ultimate plan. You ask why we do not move now, it is simply because Dumbledore, Potter, and the mudblood Granger are beyond our skill in a direct assault. Even I admit that I could not easily defeat all three in a duel. While I have the utmost confidence in the forces you command; it will not suffice to decisively win the war. We must weaken them before we make our final assault. Time is after all on our side."

Dmitri nodded with a bow and left the dark lord's inner chamber to return to his own home, personally held under a Fidelus by Lord Voldemort himself. Merlin knew that his wife had complained about the lack of playthings available at their home. With a smirk Dmitri planned a side trip to a seedy district of London to pick up some downtrodden muggles for his wife to play with. That alone would be enough to get a special treat for the night.

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, Headmaster's personal quarters 7 pm October 14th

The forces of light were not sitting idly by as Voldemort built his own forces. Charlie Weasley had single handedly drawn the support of the dragon herders, and by proxy their charges by relating the current situation in Britain. In Remus and Sirius' foray on Knockturn Alley they uncovered that someone was making some indiscrete inquiries into finding a lot of dragon feed and caging equipment. Other reports included a mass of illegal portkeys being activated, led to an informal meeting of the Order of the Phoenix.

"Welcome everyone to this informal meeting. We will be having a full meeting at some point in November." Dumbledore was gazing solemnly at the various present order members. It was one of those rare times when he had that air of omnipotence that Harry always remembered from his first two years at Hogwarts.

Continuing his thoughts, "I have received several dispatches indicating that Tom and his forces have been replenished following the minor victories we shared with the ministry in September. Additionally, Remus and Sirius extracted evidence pointing heavily to Tom also having dragons at his disposal. Discussions with Alastor have indicated that the dementors may once again be thinking of defecting to Tom's forces in the near future. I may have Harry and Hermione make a little visit to Azkaban to convince them otherwise. Are there any more comments?"

Harry sighed, "Hermione and I have reason to believe that two factions of students within Slytherin house are doing Riddle's bidding. Theodore Nott leads one and I am well aware this is not news. However, Vladimir Gorinski leads the other."

Dumbledore's brow furrowed in thought for a long moment before he said, "Gorinski was the original surname of Octavius Grindewald. Perhaps some relation?"

Hermione questioned aloud, "You did say that Grindewald's son was amongst the members of Rasputin's followers. It is very conceivable that Vladimir is Grindewald's grandchild."

Most of the order merely sat and watched the three leaders of the war movement as they unraveled a small puzzle in the only way they could.

After a moment Remus cleared his throat and with obvious amusement said, "I think we get the gist of it. What would you like us to do now?"

Dumbledore blinked, but his eyes remained on full twinkle, apparently enjoying his involvement in a new trio of sorts as he said, "Keep your eyes and ears open for anything suspicious. I will arrange for a meeting with the dementors. I have a feeling Harry and Hermione will negotiate their fealty to the ministry."

With this the various assembled members scattered and began to head towards the FLOO place in the headmaster's office to leave.

The student members all exited with promises to do something together during the coming Hogsmeade weekend. Dumbledore turned to the last two members and said, "I need you two to visit Azkaban in the first week of November. If I know Tom like I think I do, he'll be licking his wounds following a loss on the anniversary of his first defeat. He will make his move for the dementors soon after. We must move first. I will inform you when I finalize a time."

Harry and Hermione merely nodded, their roles becoming so engrained to them that the responsibility was almost a given. As they exited the room Dumbledore murmured to himself quietly, "So exits your downfall Tom Riddle."

Hogwarts Library Thursday October 31st 6:30 pm

The time had come, as Theodore Nott's grand plan to strike at Potter and his supporters began in the library against an odd Ravenclaw girl, who was much more than she appeared. As it so happened, her boyfriend second best student of his year, behind one Hermione Granger, was joining her to aid in a particularly difficult Arithmancy assignment.

Madam Pince had sipped from her tea and almost immediately fell asleep due to the strong sleeping draught that had been liberally placed when she wasn't looking. With almost every other student down in the great hall, including Potter and his mudblood, the time was ripe for a message to be sent.

Nott, Pansy, Crabbe and Goyle were disillusioned and creeping through the library when Luna came into view as she idly twirled her wand, apparently waiting for someone to come. Sure enough Mathias came into view a moment later with a helpful text he had found on the assignment from the prior year.

Brushing away a strange feeling of dread that had crept up his spine, Mathias sat the book down and said, "Now you see here love, the construct is purposefully vague to aid in its application."

Luna was about to respond when three voices all shouted out, "Diffindo." Before Luna could react, Mathias had thrown a hastily conjured shield over her, to protect her from the attack. Unfortunately, two of the attacks were meant for him, as his chest was torn open in a spray of blood, followed a moment later by a spray from his leg obviously near the femoral artery.

With a cry of pure rage, Luna cast a wide field stunner she had been experimenting with, taking a scant moment to listen for the four thumps accounting for the four cutting curses initially fired. Luna went to her knees near Mathias, who was rapidly losing consciousness along with his blood.

"Hang on baby, we need some help. Keep your eyes open love." Mathias reached a trembling hand up to cup Luna's face as one single tear fell down her face.

Suddenly a flashback of a very similar scene flashed before Luna's eyes, holding an older woman who looked very much like her as she gasped her last breaths. Just before her mother had succumbed she had reached a trembling hand up to cup her face and she had softly said, "Be strong for daddy."

Luna's attention slammed back in full force as she tearfully said, "You need to stay here for me Mathias."

A moment later a flash of fire directly above them, alerted the pair to Fawkes' presence. Suddenly Luna remembered Dumbledore's words when she had been initiated into the order, "Fawkes has a knack for aiding order members both present and future in the most dire of circumstances."

Fawkes landed on Mathias' waist and immediately began to cry into the gash on his leg. With the loss of several phoenix tears the worst of the bleeding had ended, and Fawkes cried a few more tears on the chest wound. With a short warning trill Fawkes urged Luna to have Mathias grab a tail feather as they vanished in a fall of fire.

Luna stood in her now bloody uniform and with a quickly muttered "Scourgify" the blood disappeared from her uniform and the floor. Flicking her wand once more all of the books and notes shuffled into the respective bags. Hoisting the bags over her shoulders with the ease of someone under the influence of a lot of adrenalin coursing

through her veins, Luna walked over to where the attackers had hit. With a muttered, "Finite Incantatum" she watched impassively as the four long known Voldemort sympathizers and supporters of the castle faded into existence. With four quickly incanted "Stupify" the attackers were set to rights for a bit longer.

With no apparent respect for the rules, Luna took off at a sprint out of the library, taking a moment to notice the sleeping form of Madam Pince at her desk.

Hospital Wing Thursday October 31st 6:50 pm

By the time Luna had arrived to the hospital wing, Dumbledore and Madam Pomfrey were standing next to a sleeping Mathias' bed in conversation, which was definitely heated on Madam Pomfrey's side.

Luna immediately said, "Professor Dumbledore, the students responsible are currently stunned up in the library."

Dumbledore merely nodded and with a smile said, "I am sorry Poppy but I have some students that need attending to."

As Luna watched Dumbledore's retreating form she sighed heavily, while she respected Dumbledore to no end his methods certainly left something to be desired. Too many attacks within the castle walls had occurred, and Dumbledore had well known who the problem students would be. Now her boyfriend was unconscious in the hospital wing because of Dumbledore's penchant for second chances and the like.

Not a moment later Harry, Hermione, Neville, and Susan came sprinting into the hospital wing and slowed as they spotted Luna now sitting by Mathias' bedside.

Hermione frowned, "Luna, what happened?"

Luna shrugged and said, "What else? The death nibblers in the castle decided they'd have some fun with the Loony Ravenclaw chit. Unfortunately for them Mathias had joined me this evening as well."

No one else wanted to ask any further questions as they settled around the bed and took in Mathias' pale but sleeping form. Luna startled everyone from their idle thoughts as she said, "Neville,

Susan could you please give me some time to talk with Harry and Hermione. I promise I'll tell Mathias you were here for him. I'm sure it will mean a lot to him."

Neville and Susan gave their good nights and walked out of the hospital wing hand in hand as he escorted her back to the Hufflepuff common room for safety's sake.

Harry and Hermione shared a quick look and Luna chidingly said, "You two and your talking without actually talking. Have I ever mentioned how rude that may seem to the uninitiated?"

Harry and Hermione blinked in tandem before Luna continued, "I wanted to ask the two of you what you thought of Dumbledore's advice."

Harry nodded as Hermione replied, "It has been quite a long time since we've taken the headmaster's advice at face value Luna. We take it as his opinion and nothing more in regards to almost everything."

Luna nodded; looking slightly surprised, as she said, "That's a very wise thing to do."

Harry's curiosity was running high as he asked, "Why do you ask Luna?"

Luna reached down and smoothed Mathias' hair before she replied, "It seems to me that keeping the supporters of the man we war against inside of a school would be unwise at best."

This conversation already taking on a surreal quality took another turn before Hermione said, "You don't think I agree Luna? I watched as Malfoy severed Harry's hand last year."

Luna nodded sagely as Hermione continued and asked, "Who exactly was responsible this time?"

Luna quickly replied, "Nott, Parkinson, Crabbe, and Goyle."

Harry ran a hand through his hair as he said, "Ah the B squad from the nibbler society."

Luna quirked an amused eyebrow at Harry's muggle terminology, "I assume you refer to the general competence of the members in relation to Vladimir's group." Harry merely nodded.

As a long silence stretched on Luna turned to the pair and asked, "Have you ever heard of the Knights of Walpurgis?"

A/N: First off I would like to profusely apologize for the extremely long gap between updates. As a reader I know nothing is worse than a long delay between chapters. However, I have finally passed the 'honeymoon' phase on my newest series, so expect updates to come roughly once every week and a half for each of my stories.

The scenes in this chapter were short because we have reached a plot pushing stage of the story. Next chapter I promise the scenes will be longer as will the chapters.

Any takers that Ron's change is genuine?

Next chapter we have the second half of the hospital wing discussion, Ginny's secrets revealed to 'Terry', a visit with dementor nation, and at least one expulsion...

Thanks to all of you that haven't given up on the series, and thanks for all of the reviews.

Disclaimer: It's JKR's not mine. I don't hold claim to anything particularly: deathly, horcruxy, or even Snapey. So, in other words... yes it isn't mine.

A/N: Good grief I've fallen into the untidy habit of going long periods of time without updating this story. I promise a couple of chapters before I start the sequel to open your eyes.

Hogwarts October 31st 8 pm

Luna's question hung over the silence of the hospital wing as Harry and Hermione shared a brief mental conversation. Hermione finally nodded and replied, "The knights of Walpurgis were the followers of Octavius Grindewald."

Luna sighed as she reached down and brushed back Mathias' dirty blonde hair from his forehead. Shaking her head she spoke, "I know everyone thinks I'm loony and while you two don't think I'm loony any more, I'm sure you think I still say some loony things. But, what you don't know is that I'm really not Loony at all. Seeing things or hearing things others don't, well it doesn't make you crazy it makes you perceptive. Have you ever wondered why the history of magic professor at Hogwarts was so awful?"

Harry and Hermione both shrugged before Luna continued, "There are so many things in the wizarding world's past that have been brushed over or conveniently forgotten, so many stories that have only been passed on by word of mouth or diaries. The knights of Walpurgis were counsel to the kings of Europe in medieval times and even into modern times until the monarchies began to fall apart."

Hermione frowned, "If they were such a major player why aren't they mentioned in any history books. Even the old ones in the Black library don't have mention of them."

Luna smiled slightly, "I have a unique perspective on things." Furrowing her brow she asked, "Were either of you aware that my mum was an Ollivander?" Both shook their head, "She was about five years older than Emmeline so they never really got to know each other while my great uncle took her in."

Harry blinked but nodded as Luna waved her free hand about, "At any rate, Ollivanders are one of two things in the wizarding world. They are wandmakers, amongst the best in the world, or they are recorders of history. My mum worked in the department of mysteries, but she also had a unique view of the world. Things most say don't exist in fact do, if on the proper dimensional wavelength they can be seen. It's magic of a different sort and most lack the aptitude to practice it, but it does make me more open to the realities of the world we live in. Namely, the knights of Walpurgis have been made scapegoats in the history books, when the truth is as far from that as humanly possible."

Harry pinched the bridge of his nose and quietly said, "Explain."

Luna quickly gave an abridged version of the knights and even managed to add a little bit of obscure history dealing with King Arthur and the knights of the roundtable, the same knights that were the template for the present incarnation of the knights Walpurgis. By the end of the discussion Harry and Hermione's interest was truly peaked. Deciding to throw all caution to the wind she added, "I was contacted by a member of the knights this past summer and I agreed to meet him. It came as no surprise when he indicated that the knights were interested in offering the two of you counsel. I promised I would inform you, although I was supposed to be more discrete about it."

Harry and Hermione laughed, Luna was many things but discrete typically wouldn't be amongst the varied list. Luna for her part merely shrugged before she spoke in a firmer tone, "I'm tired of having to worry about our safety inside the walls of the school simply because Professor Dumbledore thinks that some of the rotten eggs can be redeemed. Mathias is sitting here in the hospital wing because Nott and his idiots failed in their attempt to murder me. Those aren't the actions of those that can be redeemed. Whether the board of governors is pro-pureblood or not, the headmaster has final say in what students can attend school here. Think about it."

Harry softly replied, "Luna, I sat there in the great hall and watched my hand be cut off, I think we both understand your concerns. But, unfortunately part of the onus of being the good guys is that we have to hold on to the belief that good can win out, even in the minds of the diseased."

Luna sighed as she looked down at Mathias before she turned to Hermione and asked, "What do you think Hermione?"

Hermione frowned and replied, "I think that there very well may be a time and place when we can't afford to hold so tightly to our ideals. But, that time isn't now and that place isn't here. If we give in to the horrors of war before it really begins than we won't be any better than Voldemort. Good people know when the focus shifts from ideals to survival; trust in that Luna."

Luna nodded absently as Harry and Hermione bade her good night and left to get back to Gryffindor Tower. Sleep was becoming more and more scarce for all of the inhabitants of the castle; Riddle had certainly succeeded in that much at the least.

Outside of Atlanta, November 5th 6 pm

Ron Weasley had to admit he was getting tired. He had been admitted out into the general population with some convincing acting, but it hadn't been convincing enough to get that bloody American Dave, whatever his last name was. Every time he had tried to manipulate his way into looking better, Dave was there to stop him.

Sure he felt bad about everything had happened, but only because he was caught. He had spent five long years listening to damned mudblood's suffering voice, using her for homework as he was able to subtly manipulate Harry. It hadn't been particularly hard; the pair certainly trusted him enough to be stabbed in the back. He often wondered just how stupid and naïve those raised by muggles could be, but he had used it to his advantage. No one would ever know that while the sorting hat had put him immediately into Gryffindor, it had initially shouted Slytherin in his own mind.

Now he found himself in the mess hall staring down as his meal of fried chicken and grits. He still hadn't grown fully accustomed to the American's idea of what passed as good food, and as a result he had lost some weight that his wiry frame really couldn't afford to lose. The large burly wizard to his right had some sort of sweets received as a prize for good behavior, as Ron plotted to see how he could dupe the lug of his sweet Dave watched unseen. It would still be some time before Ron Weasley broke, but he would break, they all did in time.

Hogwarts, Headmaster's Office, November 8th 5 pm

Having just filled out the final papers declaring the expulsion of Theodore Nott Jr. and sent them on their way via an owl, a different letter needed to be composed from the quill of Albus Dumbledore.

Pain from over a century became readily apparent as the old wizard finished the short letter, more emotionally draining to write than it would be to read.

Marcus,

Hello my brother, it has been far too long since we've last spoken. After some consultation with Stephen I've decided to bury any remaining issues I might still grasp onto and invite you and any other family you wish to Hogwarts for the holiday season. I am sure you are well aware of the current climate here, so if you do come please come prepared for the worst, although I hope it does not come to pass.

Albus

With a sigh from Dumbledore Fawkes appeared in a flash of fire, with a sad smile the old wizard said, "Please take this to my brother Marcus, my friend. You may stay and wait for a reply if you so wish, I am well aware of the phoenix refuge in the Appalachian Mountains. Perhaps it is time we both remember the strength of family." Fawkes trilled as the letter was tied to his leg before he vanished in a flash of fire to right a wrong of the past.

Azkaban Island, November 12th 8 am

The only way into Azkaban Island was unfortunately a small ferry that left the mainland at 6 in the morning to spell the change shift in ministry workers. On this particular day two unspeakables watched from the deck of the ship as the choppy waters off the coast of Scotland in the North Sea. Those that made the trip every few days had their own opinion of the pair wearing concealment cloaks that were special ordered for Unspeakables in the field. They weren't on orders from anyone in the ministry, in fact quite the opposite they were on orders from Albus Dumbledore.

Harry sighed as he reapplied his warming charm before he turned to Hermione and said, "I wish we'd done this in the middle of the summer."

Hermione managed a chattering giggle as she felt Harry renew her warming charm as well, "We should be about ten minutes out. It's hard to tell though, not much visibility this time of the morning."

Harry grinned, "Yeah it's called before dawn love." Hermione managed to glare, and although he couldn't really see it he felt it and added, "I've never actually talked to a dementor. But, every time we've actually had the time to talk in the past they were usually trying to suck my soul out." He paused for a moment and asked, "Why are we doing this again?"

Hermione rolled her eyes but replied with a smile that could be felt in her tone, "Oh, I don't know Harry I think it has something to do with trying to keep Riddle from getting any more followers for his blasted army."

Harry yawned as he nodded, "Yeah forgot about that." Hermione merely grinned, she was well aware that Harry had been worrying about this meeting since it had been arranged by the headmaster.

Soon enough the island fortress came into focus, with its looming walls and the general feeling of dread synonymous with nearby dementors. The ship was soon pulled to the one dock on the island and the other aurors piled off, glancing in the direction of the two unspeakables but wisely refraining from comments.

Harry and Hermione were last off the boat and they took a nearly unnoticed path only for those with the proper clearance, namely other unspeakables. Those aurors leaving at the end of their twenty-four hour never noticed the pair in the dark cloaks as they approached a seeming dead end in the rock wall near the base of one of the guard towers.

Harry calmly walked up to the wall and uttered, "Shangri-la." A crack in the wall quickly became a crease and then even further as a small doorway shifted into existence. Harry and Hermione both stooped down to fit into the doorway as it closed behind them, nary a trace of its existence aside from the original crack in the stone.

Pulling down his hood Harry with a wry grin remarked, "You know there was a time I would have thought that was amazing."

Hermione pulled down her hood and with a small grin of her own replied, "Yes you're such an old man Harry. You've seen so much and nothing surprises you anymore." She finished by rolling her eyes in exasperation as they approached a small desk

A familiar looking man his, eyes dark and foreboding from long seen dark sights watched their approach before he gruffly said, "Delta cell?"

Harry and Hermione nodded, the department of mysteries operated in small cells of 2-4 people, with each cell being given an appropriate name. They had been given the moniker of delta team because they signified change and the Greek letter delta signified just that in several disciplines. Harry nodded, "Yes sir, delta team reporting for a discussion with the dementors."

The man, one of the unit leaders, his last name Croaker simply said, "The pendants required for communication with the dementors are in the next room. Follow the staircase up and you'll be face to face with the head of the dementor nation. The one who has absorbed the most souls and by proxy the most intelligence from those feasted upon."

Harry and Hermione could only nod before they quickly moved into the next room, as the first real signs of nearby dementors could be felt. They both tightened their Occlumency shields before taking the two silver necklaces. They were each adorned with a stone so black it appeared to be the absolute absence of light and once they slipped them around their necks a coldness seeped into their very souls, but it wasn't a scary feeling just a different one.

Each step up the spiral staircase brought a cold but welcoming presence nearer as if two opposing magnets were drawn to each other. Opening the small trap door at the top of the stairs Harry eased into the exposed room, at the very top of the tower. The battering winds and rain of the North Sea felt just as fully as if they had remained on the ship.

There are the top of the tower floated perhaps the most menacing looking dementor to grace the mortal coil of earth. Instead of the

fathomless dark that resided within the hood of the dementor, outwardly visible eyes more terrible than believed possible measured him. Hermione soon followed and as the door closed behind them a dark hissing voice sounded in their heads, "Child and Mistress of fates have at last favored me with their presence. You have killed several of my brethren, what do you wish to prove with this meeting?"

In her thoughts Hermione replied, "We wish to procure a promise from the dementor nation, that we will visit no more harm upon you if you visit no harm upon any but the darkest of souls."

The voice returned, "The dark one has already offered us near limitless souls. All you promise is to avoid the killing of my kind and a few tasteless souls."

Harry smirked, "Well we imagine it's easier to feed when alive then when dead."

The voice appeared less than enthused by Harry's words, "You presume that we wish to remain on this plane of existence child of fate."

Hermione's voice broke the silence, "Were you summoned to this plane?"

The voice of the head dementor returned, "We were summoned over a millennia ago by a dark witch named Morgan Le Fay. We were used to send fear throughout the country, our meals were sparse and in time we found this island as a refuge from the humans who wished to use our kind. The dark one wishes to be our ally."

Harry sighed, "The dark one shares no allies or power, merely followers who have more rights. We will not use you, and we will seek the means to return you to your rightful place. What say you?"

The voice was more ponderous, "You wish to return us to our rightful place, and in exchange we take the dark souls of your choosing and remain faithful to your plight."

Harry nodded, "Yes."

The voice finally replied, "I give my oath to fulfill that pledge which I have previously mentioned. Go and live free from the fear of our kind, child of fate and his mate."

Harry and Hermione bowed as they exited the top of the tower to escape the cold of the sea and to celebrate their success. As they left their necklaces at the original spot the once again encountered Croaker who asked, "How did it go?"

Harry merely shrugged and replied, "They won't betray us, and in exchange we pledged to work on finding a way to return them to their rightful plane of existence. Perhaps you should get the research group on alternative planes of existence, summoning and banishing rituals. It was Morgan Le Fay that summoned them."

Croaker's eyes widened comically as he asked, "How do you know?"

Hermione replied, "We took the time to ask. Something most magical people never do, and that's why we have the present mess of things that we do."

Croaker nodded as the pair boarded the boat just as it prepared to exit the island for the trip back to the mainland. All in all, the trip had taken less than thirty minutes, not too bad considering the situation and circumstances.

Unplottable location, somewhere in the British Isles November 25th 11pm

Patience, it had become one of the unavoidable strengths that Lord Voldemort had mastered from his various years of fighting to power and then merely fighting to exist. However, the patience only extended to furthering his own agenda, not anyone else's plans.

"Dmitri, what news of your son since Nott Jr. was expelled in disgrace much like his father's own failures?" Voldemort looked down contemptuously at the head reaper who had just entered the throne room.

Dmitri sighed, "Progress is slow my lord, Vladimir has learned much, but a task of the size and effort requires either more resources or patience."

Voldemort narrowed his eyes, he was well aware that the task was a daunting one, hell he feared the old coot's knowledge of older magics and that's why he never attacked him head on. But, one of the drawbacks of being a dark lord was that you had to expect results in difficult situations, or be prepared to punish failures. Finally he settled on sneering, "I expect results Dmitri, and I do not suffer my followers when my expectations are not met. Your wife will be used as an example next time your spawn does not demonstrate his abilities at my asking."

Dmitri nodded as he bowed before leaving the room as he thought, this is growing to be ridiculous, the dark lord is not only evil, he is irrationally evil. No war can be won with such leadership if this continues.

Voldemort ran a hand through his dark hair in an agitated fashion, the failures in the recent war activities needed to be fixed. An attack on the very doorstep of Hogwarts was in order, for once the quiet would be the harbinger of doom for a few poor souls.

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, December 1st 6pm

This was it, she would finally tell Terry all of her deepest and darkest secrets, and after hearing his secrets they would decide if they could work as a couple.

Finally, Terry entered the previously agreed upon empty classroom and he looked rather green about the entire thing. Ginny smiled, "Come over here Terry, I've agreed to go first to make you more comfortable when you tell me your secrets."

Terry sat down softly on the large throw rug Ginny had conjured up before she murmured, "You remember I told you about the chamber of secrets, and how Lucius Malfoy slipped me the diary?" Terry nodded slowly almost pained with the memory, "Well I've never told anyone this, but I was actually the one who planned the attack on Colin Creevy. I hated how he was always in Harry's face asking for a picture of an autograph. That time Tom let me ask the Basilisk to attack Colin, and it was strange."

Ginny twined her fingers with a silent Terry, "When I was younger I never hated anyone, but since I wrote in that diary I've become a lot

more short tempered. At least, until this year and the time I've spent with you."

Terry nodded and asked, "Have there been any other times when your anger got the best of you?"

Ginny frowned before she replied, "When I tried to use the imperius on Hermione I think it did."

Terry wrapped her into a gentle hug and said, "I'm here for you, you know that don't you Gin?"

Ginny released a trembling sigh as she sniffed a few times, the pain of her secrets weighing on her very heavily. Little did she know that her anger had begun to subside due to the destruction of horcrux pieces, weakening the shadow of Tom Marvolo Riddle that still remained on her mind. With her secrets revealed Draco knew that the clock was running; it was almost time to reveal the ruse.

Hogwarts, December 1st 9 pm

It was time for the monthly meeting of the order of the phoenix. After some serious discussion it had been agreed that Hogwarts was the most secure location and considering there was no real need to hide the group's existence any more it was the full membership seated throughout the Transfiguration classroom.

Dumbledore looked around at the group before he spoke, "Tonight's meeting will be largely informal so if you have anything to note of please just take your turn."

Moody rose to his foot and peg and spoke, "Albus already knows this, but Elphias Doge was killed last week as he looked into some suspicious behavior at a site. Unfortunately, we don't know where it was and the killers placed him back at his home."

Most of the members were somber at the news; Doge was a surviving member of the original order and was well liked. Moody continued after the moment of silence, "Aside from Doge Riddle and his forces have gone quiet. There haven't been any other attacks or unusual imports for quite some time."

Harry and Hermione shared a look before Hermione stood, "Harry and I had a meeting with the dementor's leader nearly three weeks ago, the morning after our last meeting. We negotiated it so that the dementors will remain loyal to us and the ministry, and if all goes well they will be returned to their original plane of existence."

This appeared to bolster the order members considerably as Arthur stood his wispy read hair even more mussed up than normal, "I erm, understand that this isn't completely relevant or appropriate but I thought I'd give a progress report we received on Ronald."

Harry and Hermione didn't really react other than to look on in mild interest as Arthur spoke, "Ronald's rehabilitation has been slow and he has been disciplined for some of his actions. However, according to his drill instructor he has begun to make some progress and he is confident that Ron will be rehabilitated before the summer."

Everyone nodded; Ron had simply burned too many bridges even with the censored version of events that he had precipitated. In fact, the two younger Weasleys were viewed as enemies by many of the order members, even if Harry and Hermione didn't agree simply because they had closed that chapter on their lives aside from the occasional check in on Ginny.

As Arthur sat down the room lapsed into an uncomfortable silence as Molly tried to make eye contact with Harry and Hermione. The adult Grangers were still on a sabbatical from their dental practice, but had opted against attending the meeting tonight considering the role in the order was constantly shifting. Presently they were assigned to research spells that could be utilized to improve order response time to attacks.

Surprisingly enough, Severus Snape was present for tonight's meeting the first he had attended since he had taken the position of Potions master for Harry. Snape stood and said, "I have encountered success in treating the Longbottom's overextended cruciatus exposure. Alice is improving more quickly, which indicates that she was tortured far less by Crouch and the Lestrange. Frank has finally been broken from his catatonic state, and while I hope they can interact with others once again, they will never be fully healed from the ordeal."

Snape sat down as the majority of the room conspicuously glanced at Neville, who was smiling as Susan gripped his hand tightly. Mathias and Luna quietly offered their congratulations; Luna had been strangely quiet since the conversation in the hospital wing. The entire school had been rather pensieve since the latest attack by students against other students, as if the year had somehow magically removed the worries of war within the walls of the castle despite the issues from the past year. The attack against the two Ravenclaws had ruined those delusions mere weeks before the holidays, and few had found where their lives fit into this new reality.

Dumbledore smiled warmly, "While this is most excellent news, we must move on to other pressing news; namely, the current pattern of events in relation to the past war. Voldemort always vacillates between periods of activity and inactivity, for this reason alone we must not allow ourselves to be lulled into a false sense of security. We will not have another normal meeting until after the New Year. However, if an attack happens keep your eyes open on your order pendants or for a patronus message."

Seeing the dismissal the group slowly began to file out of the classroom leaving the student members all alone. Harry and Hermione walked over to their friends before Hermione said, "I'm happy to hear your parents are improving Neville." Harry nodded his agreement to the statement as they waited for Neville's reply.

Neville had undergone a dramatic change from the shy and bumbling boy from in his first year; to a confident and powerful young wizard he was now. Of course, if anyone ever asked he would admit much of it was thanks to Harry and Hermione's support and belief in him when few others would. He replied, "My gran said that my mum has been able to carry on short discussions with her before she becomes disoriented. My dad has been walking around a bit and my gran said he smiled at her a couple of days ago."

Harry patted Neville on the back, "That's great Nev." Harry looked around, "You guys all still up for drinks at the Three Broomsticks at the end of the Hogsmeade trip this weekend?" They all nodded and parted ways for classes for the coming morning.

Ravenclaw Common Room, December 13th 11 pm

Draco was sitting in the common room, well after everyone else had gone to sleep in preparation for the Hogsmeade weekend scheduled for the next day. His days were fading fast to actually tell Ginny the details of his deception. Beyond the survival of this new and wonderful relationship he shared with Ginny, he was a Malfoy and Malfoy's knew how to survive if nothing else. His father had taught him as much before trading his life away in a war against Potter, a move that Draco now viewed as the folly of his father and not Potter.

Draco was smart enough to know that survival was the most important thing in war, at least for someone as low in the hierarchy of power as he was. He truly only had one choice if he expected to survive and have a chance to have real power like his father once had.

Survival involved sitting up correspondence with Dumbledore, and then addressing the Ginny issue. Draco was aware that Ginny's secrets held no real weight in the face of his own betrayal. Reaching into his robe pocket he drained the contents of the small vial containing the next day's dosage of polyjuice potion, after the Hogsmeade trip he would go about the process of drafting a letter for the headmaster.

### The Trail to Hogsmeade, December 14th 9 am

It was a typical December morning by Hogwarts, a very small layer of snow coating the grounds of Northern Scotland. Everyone was bundled in coats, scarves, and other wintry paraphernalia as they bounded down the bumpy path to Hogsmeade. Hermione turned to Harry with a small smile and asked, "What do you say to a trip to the shrieking shack?"

Harry leaned in and gave her an Eskimo kiss, prompting a rare Hermione giggle and the general rolling of eyes from the other inhabitants of the carriage. He quietly replied, "That sounds fine love. Remember though I need to stop at Dervish and Bangs for some supplies and we're meeting the others at the Three Broomsticks around 3." Hermione nodded as she fixed the knit hat on her head, her honey brown hair spilling out from under the fabric.

The scars of Halloween night were long past as Mathias asked, "When do you all want to do a gift exchange? I mean my dad has been really busy so I don't think a visit would really work. My mum is

supposed to be gone as she helps my older sister prepare for her wedding. My dad and I aren't leaving until the day before New Years."

Luna smiled serenely as she absently said, "Watch out for the Bohemian beep boppers Mathias, they're particularly active at weddings."

Mathias merely nodded, he like Harry and Hermione were in the minority of those who knew that Luna wasn't nearly as loony as she portrayed herself. But, then again it was always impossible to tell with Luna.

Neville and Susan watched everything unfold and the same cheerful smiles on their faces remained, as though becoming a permanent part of them. Few could still wear smiles in the shadow of war as comfortably and effortlessly as the pair, but they were simply the type to weather harsh times with the same cheerful grin.

Harry felt a fleeting ghost of a twinge on his faded scar, which really wasn't that unusual for the day-to-day business of his life. Dismissing it as simply a minor temper tantrum from Voldemort, he began to focus his mind on one of the rare days he still had as a teenager the last vestiges of childhood even if for those in the carriage that reality had fled long ago.

As they all were removed from the carriage a glance at the village brought an ominous gust of cold air that chilled all of them to the bone. As they walked into the village none of them would know just what horrors were in store for the afternoon.

A/N: There it is a pseudo cliffhanger before an afternoon of action in Hogsmeade. Do we have our first DA on reaper action, next chapter? You bet your bippy there will be.

I will immediately begin working on tweaking the next chapter sometime tomorrow so that you don't have a long wait. Thanks to everyone that reviewed last chapter in spite of my shoddy updating schedule and I'll work hard to make the next chapter worth it.

Thanks for reading and for all of the reviews.

Disclaimer: It's JK Rowling's not mine, if it were mine I'd have written a wee bit better conclusion to the series than DH.

A/N: I'm nothing if not determined, on with the show.

The village of Hogsmeade was covered in a light layer of holiday snow as numerous students and holiday shoppers flooded its streets. While it didn't have the selection of Diagon Alley, even with the students present it also didn't have the crowds and lines. The three couples all scattered to various different stores to do some late holiday shopping, and they had promised to meet at the Three Broomsticks for drinks and company before boarding the carriages late in the afternoon.

Of course, little did any of the students or staff chaperones know that the majority of the holiday shoppers were actually thirty of Voldemort's reapers under various glamour charms and polyjuice potions. By the end of the afternoon however, that lack of knowledge would be paid for dearly.

Harry and Hermione were walking closely to each other, their hand intertwined, for the entire world a young happy engaged couple. Completely normal aside from all of the less than conspicuous stares from fellow students and even the occasional non-reaper adults. The reapers were wisely accepting the dark lord's advice of "Leave Potter and his mudblood unharmed, they will be mine to kill and not until the moment is right."

Dervish and Bangs was located near the end of High Street, and the proprietor's of the shop Doug Dervish and his friend Robert Bangs treasured every time they could welcome Harry Potter into their store. It was a well known fact that any shop where Harry Potter frequented, their sales would often double due to the free publicity any of the gossip rags offered.

Harry and Hermione entered the store and politely waved and smiled at the owners before disappearing into the back of the magically expanded store. Harry turned to Hermione once they were out of earshot and said, "Those guys always weird me out when I come in here."

Hermione laughed softly, "I know, it's like instead of waving at us they're waving at a pair of giant galleons that they can't wait to spend."

Harry nodded and said, "Exactly, but they do make some of the most ingenious little things. I got an owl from Remus indicating that he had heard from a friend that they invented a variation on the foe glass that can also scry for an enemy's location."

Hermione's eyes widened, "So if Voldemort ever got close enough..."

Harry nodded, "I could scry for him and head him off at the pass. I am going to ask Dobby to keep an eye on it after I'm certain it works."

Hermione eyed him in disapproval, she still harbored some displeasure at Harry's willingness to use the little elf, but, even she had to admit that house elves were happiest when able to serve a master. It was a fact that caused her no joy or happiness in the least, but did ultimately give her at least one thing to strive for after Riddle was vanquished for good.

Walking up to the counter with the modified foe glass Harry said, "Hello gentlemen, just one of your scrying foe glasses today."

Dervish grinned and began to package the object as Bangs merely nodded his head randomly like one of the bobble heads that the muggles were so fond of. Hermione barely managed to contain her laughter as Harry paid for the foe glass and they walked out of the store together.

### Jameson's Books and Antiquities

The lone bookstore in all of Hogsmeade was understandably empty as the majority of students wanted little if anything to do with books this close to a holiday. That being said, those rules when out the window when shopping for bibliophiles like one Gryffindor and a pair of Ravenclaws.

Susan smiled as Neville had buried his nose in a herbology book, almost instantly upon arrival. Neville may have grown into a powerful

and confident wizard, but he was still the small boy she first met when he was seven and working in his family's ancestral garden.

Shaking her head she turned to the shopkeeper and asked, "Excuse me, but where are your books on Wizarding customs?"

The older gentleman pointed to the far corner and Susan glanced over at Neville, still poring over the book titled *Magical Plants of the Sahara Desert*. She rolled her eyes and smiled fondly before walking back to the corner and browsing through the selection.

Susan was perhaps the most unknown quantity of the group of six, which were in essence the bulldogs of Hogwarts. She was generally quiet and while not shy, only spoke when she had something of importance to add. But, she unlike the others had an amazing grasp on the politics of the Wizarding world.

Harry and Hermione mainly got by with talent and skill as a crutch, Mathias had some vague experience but he had always struck her more as an academic than a politician. Luna, well she probably knew more than she let on, but in Susan's eyes that could only be an advantage. Neville had surprisingly been groomed to take a seat in the Wizengamot by his grandmother over the past couple of years, and he was an adequate while not impressive politician.

The problems were simply that Susan knew that all of her friends would need to manipulate the politics of their world in the coming years, because like it or not if they survived they would be amongst the leaders of the next generation. In fact, if Susan's suspicions were right one of the two Potters would be helming the reigns of the ministry given sufficient time. The other would probably be in charge or in line to succeed the headmaster at Hogwarts. Smiling she began to pick out books, fate had definitely given her quite the group of friends.

As Susan was weeding through the various books she began to think about the numerous changes the past year had effected on her life. It was roughly a year ago when she had begun to have serious thoughts about Neville, and she was introduced into the small but tightly knit group of friends that she presently had.

Susan had lost her aunt a couple of months ago, and still she tried to remember all of the good things her aunt had taught her. Things

like, the true measure of a person is the company they keep, or even her aunt's steadfast and unusual belief in the golden rule. Principles like honor and selflessness had served her aunt well, and she would see that she honored the woman that was more a parent to her than the ones she lost at a young age.

Neville finally appeared with the book he had been browsing in hand before he asked, "You find what you needed to yet Suzy?"

Susan smiled sadly and nodded, "Yes, I was just picking up some books for presents."

Neville frowned in concern, "Are you feeling fine?"

Susan sighed, "I was just thinking about my aunt."

Neville nodded, "You know you can talk to me about anything, don't you Suzy?"

Susan gave him a fond smile, "I do Neville. I love you."

Neville glanced around nervously before he leaned in and gave her a gentle kiss. He gently rubbed his hand on her cheek before he said, "Come on let's go to Madam Puddifoot's to talk for awhile and then I'll buy you anything you want from Honeydukes." Susan smiled softly as she took Neville's hand and they paid for their books before leaving en route to their next destination.

### Gladrag's Wizardwear

Mathias Stern was a patient young man, it was a trait learned from the hard borne experience of growing up with a mother who brought him along as she worked at a daycare. Of course, Mathias made a few friends in his time at the daycare as a young child but most of his time was spent reading; a fact that led him to the second highest set of marks in his year ever since he had started at Hogwarts. How he found himself modeling goat fur socks on a Hogsmeade weekend would be a fair bit more difficult to explain.

"Luna, sweetie I am really beginning to feel uncomfortable here." Mathias softly complained.

Luna glanced up from the pile clothes she was gathering before she said with a touch of asperity and feminine superiority, "Oh hush you, I need to get daddy some clothes and you are my model for the day so just put up with it."

Mathias managed one last long suffering sigh before he was shooed into the changing room to try on some clothes which placed her more along the lines of a yodeler than a wizard.

As she watched Mathias walk into the changing room Luna grinned, before she turned to a nearby employee and said, "I so do love having a boyfriend who humors me."

The woman glanced at her blankly for a moment before she gave an odd sound of agreement. Little did Luna know that the 'woman' was in fact a polyjuiced reaper who had killed the female employee that she was presently impersonating a few minutes earlier, a disconcerting notion to almost anyone.

As Mathias grumbled and walked out of the fitting room Luna squealed, "Oh that will be perfect for daddy." She finally turned a sympathetic eye to her boyfriend and consoled, "Get changed back into your clothes I have a surprise for you."

Mathias returned and handed Luna the 'perfect' clothes before he asked, "Ok, so what's this surprise?"

Luna casually folded the clothes as she almost absently replied, "Oh we're going to go make some snow people and snog for awhile." Mathias' eyebrows arched but his mouth settled into an expectant and vindicated smile, maybe clothes shopping with Luna wasn't such a bad thing to do after all.

### Zonkos

Ginny was really in her element on Hogsmeade weekends, she had Terry at her beck and call, and she repaid him by being extra touchy feely and affectionate.

Terry was being chased around the giant joke shop by one of the new products, a humping Niffler. Ginny watched her boyfriend trying to fend off the little beast before she said, "You know, if I knew you liked Nifflers..."

Terry scowled playfully, "The things I put up with."

Ginny laughed and tucked her shiny red hair behind her ear before she finally found her quarry. Slytherin house had become once again the unofficial staging ground for Voldemort's junior supporters. This time however, it was less enforced by intimidation and bullying. Vlad had taken on a nickname very early in the common room. He was called "Vlad the Impaler", much like the count from Transylvania that the muggles believed was a vampire. He wasn't a vampire but he sacrificed many people in blood rituals to boost his magical power, much like Voldemort.

At any rate Vladimir's nickname had stuck simply because the Durmstrang transfer could simply impale you with his stare. If you crossed him they promised terror and pain beyond comprehension, not something many teenagers were accustomed to. Ginny had additional concerns because she would catch the new prince of evil always leering at her, but she had eventually convinced herself it was all in her head and seemingly the looks had stopped.

Ginny's stray thoughts were broken as Terry walked up close and asked, "So where else do you want to go once we're done here?"

Ginny smiled as she wrapped her arms around his waist and gave him a hug before she pulled away and said, "You still have to tell me your secret Terry, so I booked a back booth at Madam Puddifoot's. It's for couples who need some privacy to talk and not just snog."

Draco sighed but nodded, he had hoped for one last day of happiness before it all crashed down around him and he still hadn't had the opportunity to explain his predicament to Dumbledore. Following Ginny he began to picture all of the worst possible scenarios for his announcement, he found it easier to think of how bad it could be as opposed to the best he could hope for, which still entailed Ginny leaving him. Shaking his head of the nasty thoughts he glanced down at his watch and sighed, it was nearing noon and he knew it was his first true day of reckoning.

As Ginny paid for the little novelty gag from her purse she turned to Terry and quietly said, "Best be off now." Terry merely nodded as he held the door open for her and they reentered the main drag.

## The Shrieking Shack

Hermione was pressed tightly to the wall as Harry's tongue swept into her mouth; they hadn't had an opportunity to do so much alone time since during the summer. There was nothing particularly gentle about their present activity, as Hermione had locked her jean covered legs around the small of Harry's back as they kissed each other roughly.

While they had no intentions of going further than some enthusiastic snogging, it was working remarkably well to relieve the building sexual frustration that is often akin to happening for young couples starting out.

Breaking apart breathlessly Harry spared a glance at his watch, "It's after two already love."

Hermione smiled as Harry eased her away from the wall before she unlinked her ankles and stood on somewhat shaky legs. She reached up and traced his lips with her finger before she said, "Has anyone ever told you, that you're a brilliant kisser?"

Harry straightened his collar as he replied, "There was this one witch, brilliant but she was scary."

Hermione looked at him amusedly and asked, "Oh?"

Harry nodded as he attempted to straighten his perpetually messy locks, "Oh yes, but she grew up into an even more beautiful woman. I reckon some lucky bloke is spending the afternoon with her somewhere."

Hermione merely grinned as she finished straightening her blouse, she offered her hand and said, "Why don't we take a bit of a scenic route?"

Harry merely nodded; he would follow her wherever she wanted to go. After they bundled back up they exited the shrieking shack, and instead of heading back down the street into town Hermione led Harry down a foot trail that led to a round about way to the village. Of course, this decision would come back to haunt both of them for a long time to come.

## The Three Broomsticks

Filius Flitwick was sitting in one of the elevated bar stools of the three broomsticks fulfilling his role as one of the four chaperones for the Hogsmeade trip. Many people underestimated the little wizard, a fact that many of those that he had met both on the dueling stage and on the academic stage quickly learned that it wasn't a wise thing to do.

He like every other member of the Hogwarts staff understood the enticing target such a weekend offered, but they all also understood that life could not stop simply because a force of sadistic killers were somewhere in or around the country. The four chaperons had been split across the town, and Filius had managed to nice comfy environment of the Three Broomsticks based upon his seniority alone.

He smiled as he watched Neville Longbottom and Susan Bones enter the tavern/bar, he had always known that Neville had a tremendous amount of potential as a wizard and he would have aided him if Neville had been a Ravenclaw. However, the fates sorted him into Gryffindor and while Minerva likely would have taken him under her wing as well, she had been far too indisposed keeping tabs on that golden trio of her house. Of course he was well aware of the ultimate deception and betrayal at the hands of one appendage of the trio, now a duo, but it hadn't altered the fact that Harry Potter and Hermione Granger were a handful for any single person.

But, now Neville had found his niche in a group with Potter, Granger a couple of his own Ravenclaws, and even found companionship in the form of Susan Bones. His potential had come to the surface and Filius couldn't help but feel relieved that at one least good thing could come from trying times such as these. Blinking in surprise at his own thoughts Filius pulled a small watch from his pocket and saw that it was nearly three o'clock. They had only a couple of more hours to go and another threat could be put behind them.

## The Fields Outside of Hogsmeade

Luna looked at her final creation; it was true a snow-Snorkack hadn't been undertaken before as far as she knew, but she was confident that she and Mathias had been up to the task. The creature had the

tell-tale crumple horns on its head, but contrary to popular, or unpopular, belief they were rather small horns and merely framed the creatures other features instead of acting as a defense of some sort.

Of course they had ample time to snog as the creature was assembled, and even Luna would be remiss to miss such a prime opportunity to do so with her boyfriend. She sighed as she watched Mathias put the finishing touches on the Snorcack, he was really more than she had ever hoped to have found in a companion.

He humored her, he obviously cared for her, and at the end of the day he could also challenge her intellectually. Few knew so, but Luna was the top student of her year and had been straight from the start. That was part of the reason, along with her general aloofness that the other girls of Ravenclaw had harassed her so, jealousy mixed with confusion. Sure it hurt being attacked verbally by those that she slept with, but she had learned that the proper mixture of silencing charms and a stiff upper lip would see her through it.

Mathias finished smoothing the snow on the joint creation and he turned to Luna and asked, "How does it look?"

Luna graced him with one of her rare but beautiful genuine smiles as she replied, "It's wonderful, better than I could have ever hoped for."

Mathias grinned, he understood both meanings just fine, but it was all overshadowed by those rare times when he could see that smile. He walked up to her and wrapped her in a tender hug before he glanced down at his watch and whispered into her ear, "We need to get going if we want to make it to the Three Broomsticks on time." Luna nodded and they began to walk back down the path into the village.

### Center of Hogsmeade Village

On the middle of high street between Zonko's and Honeyduke's the signal went up for the first wave of the attack at the Three Broomsticks and Madam Puddifoot's. Harry and Hermione were just winding the bend of their trail when they could hear shouts in the distance of the village. Seamlessly transforming into their coyote forms they covered ground at a much faster rate.

As they neared the village they transformed back mid-sprint and took up a sprint in their human forms, mentally preparing for the worst in the village.

Whether it was purely coincidence of a measure that the reapers actually had a conscience, the third and fourth year students that seemingly all populated Zonko's and Honeyduke's were seemingly spared as warning shots were thrown about the building.

Luna and Mathias immediately took control, and upon finding Slughorn looking feverish and frantic they began to escort the sixty or students they could.

Mathias frowned at the frantic professor before he said, "Professor Slughorn you need to get a grip and you need to lead the younger students back to the castle. If Harry was telling the truth we should have a way out of here through Honeyduke's. The hysterical younger students were slowly calmed as Mathias and Luna checked the remainder of the shop for more children before finding the same trapdoor Harry used in his third year.

Luna pushed Slughorn down the passage and said, "Follow this to the end professor; it should take you to the school's grounds. The wards will protect you from there. Keep them in line and don't let them lose control."

Slughorn nodded feverishly, thankful to be spared the battle as he said, "Of course my dear, I'll be up to the task."

As the last student was ushered into the tunnel Mathias closed the trap door just as the building was rocked with a tremendous blast.

Mathias glanced over to Luna who gave him a determined nod before they brandished their wands and made for the back entrance of the store, to find the alleyway and some firing lines for the fight.

### Alleyway behind Honeydukes

Harry and Hermione sprinted into town; their primary wands in hand and nearly opened fire when a back entrance of Honeyduke's swung open revealing Mathias and Luna.

Harry gasped, "Great Merlin we almost obliterated you two."

Neither Mathias nor Luna seemed too perturbed as Luna succinctly stated, "We cleared out Zonko's and Honeyduke's using that hidden passage you told us about. Professor Slughorn is leading them back to the castle."

Hermione glanced at Harry fleetingly before she said, "Ok, from the looks of the smoke they are hitting Madam Puddifoot's and the Three Broomsticks. Have you two seen Neville or Susan?"

Mathias shook his head, "Nope, but those two are always on time so I imagine they're in the Three Broomsticks."

### The Three Broomsticks

The first minute of the attack saw the majority of the adult villages felled in some very gruesome manners. Flitwick had managed to kill two reapers himself with a pair of well aimed reductos, but he was then knocked unconscious by an explosion of alcohol behind Rosmerta's bar and had been sent flying across the tavern. Fortunately, for Flitwick he had landed on Neville and Susan's booth and a well time cushioning charm by the Gryffindor saved the diminutive professor from his end.

Rosmerta herself wasn't so fortunate, but in the following minutes the odds had been significantly even as Neville and Susan along with a few other DA members, including Lavender Brown, Blaise Zabini, and Daphne Greengrass.

Neville glanced over the booth that Blaise had transfigured into a metal barricade before he turned back, Daphne was working on stabilizing Flitwick and Susan had been hit by a strange blue curse that sent her into an episode similar to epilepsy. A quick stunning spell was all Neville could afford her, although his heart shattered thinking of all of the horrid things the curse could have done.

Blaise had been gashed by some shattering glass at the first big explosion and occasionally he would be forced to wipe blood from his eyes as it trickled down from his scalp. Ernie...well he had quite literally lost his head from some nasty variation of a severing charm that cut through the Hufflepuff like a hot knife through butter. Fortunately, there were only two reapers left in the actual building which meant that the students barely had the odds in their favor.

The floors of the normally lively establishment were littered with blood and bodies of about ten students and even more villagers. Neville could only pray that this was the worst of the damage in the village, but he didn't want to hold his breath on that as he lifted his head over the barrier and shouted, "Fracta" and a purple wave of light impacted one of the remaining reapers directly between the eyes and was quickly followed by the unpleasant sight of a human head exploding all over the place.

The final reaper decided that survival was more important than more mayhem at this point and activated a portkey vanishing in a swirl and flash of color.

A moment later Mathias and Luna busted through the entrance of the building and only their hastily cast shields kept them from a similar fate as the last fallen reaper. The haunted look in Neville's eyes answered any questions that the two Ravenclaws might have had, and all they could do was check for survivors and help with the injured.

Ten reapers had been sent into the three broomsticks and only one of them had managed to survive, and that was a factor of self reservation more than skill. The primary factor siding against the highly skilled dark wizards was the tight quarters from which to combat in. In other words, rarely were evil wizards prepared to fight on even footing or even at a slight disadvantage as was the case this time around. Casualties had been high on both sides, a luxury Riddle and his forces couldn't afford.

Throughout the rest of the village the student's were faring far better as Harry and Hermione watched McGonagall and Sprout ushering the vast majority of the remaining students into the carriages. Of course, it had certainly helped when the two Gryffindor students had injured and sent five reapers retreating in just under a minute.

### Madam Puddifoot's

Madam Puddifoot's had contained only five reapers, simply for size and space requirements then if for no other reason. With the holidays in full effect the tea shop had been occupied by a few students, but far less than it would for Valentine's Day.

Terry and Ginny had been spared the initial attack as they had been out of plain sight range when the reapers had entered. Presently they were trading spellfire with the five reapers to a stand still, the bodies of five students already having been severed from their souls irrevocably. Madam Puddifoot had been trapped in a storage closet at the start of the fight and would be one of the many adults of the village with their lives spared due to luck.

The reapers were slowly working down the two student's defenses when a black bolt caught Draco's shoulder, of course to Ginny Terry had been the one that had suffered some severe damage to his shoulder. Ginny was about to join her boyfriend when the front door of the teashop was neatly vaporized into a powder by Harry who entered the shop with two wands trained for targets followed directly behind by Hermione. The five reapers wisely fled the scene, as they activated their portkeys and the surprise attack on Hogsmeade had been ended. In all the entire attack had taken less than ten minutes but over forty innocent people had been killed.

Harry approached Ginny and called out, "Who's back there?"

Ginny replied, "It's me Ginny Weasley. Terry's been hurt badly and I don't really know where anyone else is."

Hermione scampered back to the downed boy and she grimly said, "We need to get him to Hogwarts now, or he isn't going to make it."

As if by magic Fawkes, perhaps the only being in the castle who knew Draco's identity appeared out of thin hair and latched on to the boy before vanishing to the hospital wing.

Harry and Hermione finally began to fall from their tremendous magical/adrenaline rush and with a trembling hand he mussed his hair before he said, "Shit." Hermione and Ginny wisely didn't comment, because it would have been wasteful, it was exactly the same sentiment running through their heads as well.

### Unplottable Location in the British Isles

Voldemort smiled languidly as his fingers traced the curve of Bellatrix's breast, the attack hadn't been an overwhelming success like he'd hoped, but it had accomplished everything it needed to.

The ritual he had just completed finally put his immortality back on the right track, and in the coming days he would finally set his empire into motion. The House of Slytherin would long be synonymous with those who sought power, and would allow nothing to stand between them and complete domination.

A/N: Next chapter, the obvious issues will include the appearance of Draco Malfoy and disappearance of Terry Boot, Susan's condition following the attack, and the effect the attack has on the school. Will Hogwarts be forced to close its doors?

Thanks to all of you that have reviewed and thanks for all of the condolences for my dearly departed computer.

Disclaimer: It's JKR's not mine. If it was mine don't you think I would have told you all awhile ago?

A/N: If you couldn't tell, I am back in the game with my shiny new computer. Here is the continuation following the attack on Hogsmeade. Additionally, I have come to the conclusion that the 'final battle' will come at the end of this sixth year. A little while to go before we get there though.

It was insane in the hospital wing at Hogwarts as Madam Pomfrey and a couple of mediwitches from St. Mungo's worked feverishly on the survivors of the attack. Lesser Injuries like Blaise's lacerated scalp were far down on the list as they tackled the various students in some kind of necessitated order.

Neville sat stone-faced as he watched the two mediwitches work on Susan as she twitched and thrashed on the bed. He had vaguely heard something about epilepsy and possible brain damage, but he was too focused on not completely losing it to have anything register beyond the barest level.

Madam Pomfrey on the other hand was feverishly working on Terry Boot's shoulder, or rather the bit of flesh and bone that remained of his shoulder. Whatever curse he had been hit by, it basically turned sinew, bone, and cartilage into little more than dust. Unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately, the curse did not cauterize the wounds. This meant two different possibilities existed for the pale and dying young man, he could bleed out if not treated in time, or he could survive and have his shoulder re-grown thanks to magic and a live bloody supply.

As Madam Pomfrey finished on her patient she wiped her brow before she decided it was time to tackle Professor Flitwick's battered and unconscious form.

Mathias and Luna had finally finished their brief conversation with Dumbledore describing their actions during the attack when the old wizard sent them on their way with an earnest thanks for a job well done. Harry and Hermione were forced to stay a bit longer and talk with the headmaster but Hermione suggested to them as they left, "Go check on Neville and Susan guys tell them we'll be there as soon as we can."

The pair entered just as they watched a beleaguered and bawling Hagrid carried in yet another bloodied and broken body. Luna wanted to scream but it was almost all too surreal and numbing to contemplate the sheer scope of the carnage and death. Harry and Hermione had borne witness to death on equal scale before at Diagon Alley, but none of their friends had, and it was beginning to show.

Madam Pomfrey called out for help amidst the madness; apparently there had been a hidden injury on the small professor. Mathias tugged on Luna's hand and they ran over to the bead to see their head of house bleeding profusely.

Luna's eyes widened and Mathias was reminded of the night they had been attacked, a couple of months earlier. Sitting her down in a chair gently he quickly turned to Madam Pomfrey, "What can I do?"

Madam Pomfrey had managed to stop the bleeding somewhat as she replied, "I need you to hold constant pressure here and not let up until I say you can."

Mathias merely nodded as he placed pressure on the blood sodden gauze; he would be horrified and terrified at some other time. He was certain nightmares would haunt him for a few months as he envisioned the various people he cared for in a similar state. For now however, he had to help save his favorite professor and nothing else mattered.

Madam Pomfrey bustled back to the bedside and nodded at Mathias affirmatively as he still held pressure on the bloody wound. With a couple of expert flicks of her wand a magical I.V. became attached to Flitwick's arm as healing potions slowly began to pump into his small body.

She nodded and said, "Ok Mr. Stern, I need you to remove the pressure so I can heal the wound. Have you ever used the medical variation of the scourgify spell?"

Mathias blinked before he replied, "I've seen my mum use it. So I think I can do it if you need me to."

Madam Pomfrey sighed, she really had no other option at the moment and it wasn't that complicated of a spell. Finally she nodded,

"Very well remove the pressure now, and I'll tell you when you need to use the spell."

Removing the gauze Madam Pomfrey weaved her wand similar to a sewing needle before she said, "Do it now Mr. Stern."

Mathias raised his wand, "Scourgify Vulnus." He completed the spell with the necessary flick of his wand and watched as the blood of dirt around the wound was vanished revealing the last bit of torn flesh mend together from Madam Pomfrey's spell.

After another casual flick of her wand Madam Pomfrey nodded absently as she said, "You could have a career as a healer Mr. Stern. You did well to keep your head there, and I will make sure to inform Professor Flitwick when he regains consciousness."

Mathias blinked in surprise at the school healer; he had never really given thought to healing as a career option when Flitwick had spoken to him last year. But now, well suddenly it didn't sound like such a ridiculous notion after all. With a start he realized that now wasn't the best time for such thoughts so he excused himself, grabbing Luna from her chair before heading towards Neville as he sat and watched Susan still in her bed.

### Headmaster's Office

Dumbledore was presently in a staring match with his two favorite students, trying to get some sort of explanation as to why they weren't in the village when the attack had begun. Plucking a lemon drop from his bowl on his desk he couldn't help but curse the fact that the pair had learned Occlumency beforehand.

Finally he cracked, "Would you please tell me what caused the two of you to be out of the village when you were needed the most?"

Harry bristled while Hermione looked rather crestfallen before the young wizard took charge, "Now you listen here. It isn't our job to protect the students of the school; it is your job to arrange for that. Hermione and I did the best we could with the situation we were placed in. So just where do you get off trying to apportion blame for this to us?"

Dumbledore raised his hands in a placating gesture, "Harry, I never once said that any blame for the attack belongs on your shoulders. I merely asked why you were not in the village when needed most."

Harry deflated slightly and replied, "We wanted some time alone and we went to the shrieking shack, which is in the village. After awhile we decided to take a scenic trail back into the village. Once we spotted the smoke in the distance we got to the village as quickly as we could."

Dumbledore nodded before he turned to Hermione, "Do you have anything to add Miss Granger?"

Hermione paused at this, since when had she been called Miss Granger? Finally she replied, "No sir, Harry covered it all." She fitfully added, "How many people were hurt or killed?"

Dumbledore sighed heavily, "By first accounts nearly fifty are dead including nine of the reapers that were sent in to attack the village. By all accounts the majority of the dead were seventh year students and villagers in and around the three Broomsticks. I believe the only confirmed casualty from your DA was Mr. McMillan."

Hermione released a small sob, while Harry looked numbly at the headmaster trying to assimilate the fact that fifty people had died in the village during the time of the attack. Hermione threw all worries or propriety aside as she climbed up into his lap and quietly cried into Harry's shirt. Dutifully, Harry pulled her closer and stroked her hair gently as she soaked his sweater vest through with her tears. He had long ago pledged that he would do everything in his power to prevent this precious person from feeling such pain and he knew that there would be more tears and desperate embraces before the day was over. He loved her unconditionally, and knew she would comfort him when it got to be too much for him as well.

Finally the tears began to subside and she pulled away far enough to give Harry a quick peck on the lips before she whispered in a hoarse tone, "We should go to the hospital wing and see how the others are doing."

Dumbledore had walked over to the window in his office in an effort to give the couple some measure of privacy before Harry said, "We

will talk about this more at the next order meeting. Do you plan on calling an emergency meeting to discuss the attack?"

Dumbledore sighed heavily, "Yes I fear that certain issues must be brought to light. You may tell your friends I will send a message from Fawkes."

As the pair stood and prepared to exit the office the FLOO place in the headmaster's office flared to life and the face of Amos Diggory peered out formed from the emerald flames. "Albus, we're just getting word on the attack at Hogsmeade. I think we need to have a talk about the steps we need to take in order to minimize the impact of the attack and also the pain for the families of the victims."

Dumbledore walked over to his fireplace and opened the grate allowing visitors. Amos Diggory and Mad-Eye Moody stepped out a moment later, catching sight of Harry and Hermione as they closed the door to Dumbledore's office behind them.

Amos dusted the FLOO powder off of his shoulders before he asked, "Ok Albus, I want you to tell me what happened today to the best of your abilities. We will have to plan extra security procedures and deal with a memorial service that will hopefully be finished by Monday. I think we have no choice but to end the term a week early."

Dumbledore sat down in his chair heavily, burying his face in his hands for a long moment in an attempt to gather some hidden strength to handle the horrors of the remainder of the day. Finally he relaxed and pulled his hands away from his face, "I am sorry; this day has already proven to be unbearably stressful." Amos and Moody merely nodded as Dumbledore gathered his wits, "I do agree Amos, and we should end the term early. Would the ministry be willing to add some additional security for the Express' return trip to King's Cross?"

Moody grunted, "I can give you twenty of my better aurors for guard duty, but maybe Potter and Granger could be persuaded to wear their ministry uniforms on the train to provide an additional presence."

Dumbledore furrowed his brow, "I was aware they had some sort of position within the ministry, are they in the auror corps?"

Moody grunted again, "Something like that Albus. Just ask them to wear their dress uniforms on the train ride; they're smart enough to take it from there." Dumbledore merely nodded his face a mixture of great sadness and puzzlement.

Amos sighed, "We'll discuss details later, let's go down to the hospital wing and see if we can get some more information to supplement what you already know Albus."

Hospital Wing 3:45 pm

Harry and Hermione entered the hospital wing and immediately they were shocked to see all of the wounded scattered about in hospital beds or makeshift cots. Luna, Mathias, and Neville were huddled around Susan's bed as they consoled each other on the state of their friend.

As they approached Hermione murmured into Harry's ear brokenly, "Oh please let her be ok."

Harry's shoulders slumped some as the overwhelming guilt for not being better, or for leaving the village for any time as if it could have prevented all of the deaths weighed down on his already guilt riddled conscience. It was never easy bearing so much responsibility and failing in it, but with time and experience Harry had gotten to the point where he could carry the burden and soldier on, "How is our girl doing guys?"

Neville's stony expression didn't change as he replied, "Madam Pomfrey told us that she should regain consciousness soon and then she'll be able to determine what damage was done to her nervous system."

Harry swallowed thickly, "What was she hit with?"

Luna quietly answered, "It was an epilepsy cascade curse."

Harry looked blankly at Luna while Hermione gasped in shock and dismay. While Harry had taken the time to learn several dark arts spells and how to counter them he had never come across this curse. Hermione noticed his confusion and decided to give him an idea of the challenge their friend would have in front of her.

"Harry, the epilepsy cascade curse attacks neural pathways in the brain and if applied for too long attacks the cerebral cortex and can lead to permanent brain damage." Hermione explained quietly.

Harry picked up enough of the terminology to take on a grim expression before he asked, "Neville?"

Neville was looking down at Susan with a softer expression on his face before Mathias poked him in the arm gently to draw his attention to Harry for a reply. Blinking Neville turned to Mathias, "What?" Mathias motioned over to Harry and he repeated the question, "What was that Harry?"

Harry gave him a fleeting grin before his expression became solemn, "How long was she under the curse?"

Neville's face became pained before he replied, "It wasn't long, and Blaise managed to hit the bastard with a reducto to break the connection. Not more than 5 seconds I'd imagine, why?"

Hermione shrugged helplessly, not really knowing any more specifics on the spell as Harry sighed, "The longer she was under the curse the more damage is done. But, we'll just have to wait and see I guess."

Neville's expression changed dramatically as he was reminded of how his parents had been for so many years at St. Mungo's. But unlike his parents Susan's condition could very well be permanent, and that thought alone left him feeling very hollow inside for the first time all day. Even with the knowledge that he had killed a handful of people earlier didn't effect him as much.

Looking down at Susan's prone form he grasped her hand and desperately hoped, Don't leave me now Susan.

Other side of the Hospital Wing 5 pm

Ginny was quietly sitting next to Terry's bed, occasionally glancing up to catch a glimpse of Harry and his friends every few minutes. The day had been rather disconcerting after the stop in the joke shop. Terry had become rather withdrawn and morose as the time approached for his greatest secret was revealed. To say Ginny was

accustomed to subterfuge, one would only have to look back to her first year to see her bitter experiences of the past. She was certain that Terry had been about to say something beyond awful when he had been interrupted by the attacking Reapers and now she just wanted him to be healthy before dealing with that issue. Little did she know that as the evening progressed, Terry's health would become one of the last things on her mind as such.

When Madam Pomfrey finished stabilizing the remaining patients she walked over to Terry's bed and asked Ginny quietly, "How's our patient doing?"

Ginny replied in a tiny and squeaky voice, "His shoulder is mending slowly."

Madam Pomfrey nodded and flicked her wand a couple of times as she cast some diagnostic charms, such as blood typing and checking for hidden poisons that wouldn't have shown up on the first scans. Suddenly, a flash of green left her with a perplexed and worried expression as she murmured, "Albus will have to know this immediately."

Ginny however, was too locked into her own worries that she never noticed Madam Pomfrey continue her murmuring, "Polyjuice potion, I'll have Albus contact the aurors."

Meanwhile, the inner circle of the DA was still huddled around Susan's bed when the doors to the infirmary swung open to reveal Dumbledore, Minister Diggory, and Mad-Eye Moody. Dumbledore's eyes lost their typical twinkle, Diggory's face showed a long buried pain floating to the surface, and Moody seemed implacable as usual. Madam Pomfrey almost immediately sought the three out and in urgent but hushed tones, Harry and Hermione watched as the expressions of the three men darkened.

Moody walked over to the assembled group and spoke in a harsh whisper, "You see over there in Boot's bed?"

The five nodded and he continued, "Your school healer tells us that he is polyjuiced. We won't know who it is until the potion wears off, but I want you five to keep an eye on the bed and look for any signs of change. By all estimations whom ever it is has some super

polyjuice potion running through them that lasts past the typical one hour."

The five all nodded before Moody left to join Diggory and Dumbledore on the tour of the hospital wing to see the injured students and villagers.

He found the other two in a corner of the far end of the ward and stomped over to them before he said, "I've got them keeping an eye on Boot's bed."

Dumbledore nodded, "Very well Alastor, I believe that Horace has some veritaserum on hand. We will have to question the individual in question and then count our options from henceforth."

Amos frowned as he ran a hand through his tousled tawny hair, "I'd feel more comfortable if we have some official ministry interrogators here, even if they are working on an off the clock basis."

Dumbledore frowned imperceptibly, "I understand your concerns Amos, but surely we can be trusted to interrogate the prisoner fairly."

Amos shook his head, "Rightfully Albus, the school should be closed until such a time when it can be a truly safe. I think in this instance I must insist that we use agents of the ministry to ensure that the testimony is unbiased and properly utilized."

Dumbledore looked unenthused by Amos' words but reluctantly ceded to the minister, "Very well, will my office suffice?"

Diggory and Moody shared a brief look before the ex-auror nodded, "Ok Albus, but you don't start the questioning until we arrive and I'll get Potter's word on that."

Dumbledore sighed but nodded. As each battle of the war was fought he felt a little more of the control he had been granted in the first war with Voldemort shifting away to others. In his mind he understood that his time as the leader of the light was nearly finished, but an old man's pride was something entirely different from his rational mind. The two often warred nowadays despite the fact that the writing had been on the walls for nearly six full years, or at least since Harry first stepped foot onto Hogwarts grounds.

Draco Malfoy was floating in the ethereal mist of unconsciousness, just lucid enough to dream and yet still have a grasp of his thoughts. It was definitely one of the advantages of being under a stasis spell as he was healed. He had retained enough of his jumbled thoughts from the day, or at least he hoped it was the same day, at least that way he would know how everything would transpire when he was completely conscious.

When he awoke he would be immediately surrounded by aurors he would have to imagine, because one of the weaknesses of polyjuice potion was that it was easily detectable in a witch or wizard's blood. He cursed himself for not seeing Dumbledore sooner, for trying to have a few more days of his great existence with Ginny, and yet it seemed that Voldemort had messed that up for him again. Yes, he Draco Malfoy had begun to call the dark lord by his self appointed moniker sometime over the course of the fall term, in his mind anyways.

Shaking his head from the random thought he began to piece together what he hoped would be an honest portrayal of his actions for the past 10 months, and to make sure that Ginny could be spared as much pain as humanly possible.

As he drifted along he also began to mentally catalog his best memories with the only witch he would likely ever have feelings for. If he managed to avoid Azkaban he was certain that Potter and Dumbledore would place him in harms way as a spy of some sort, but in reality he knew with his weak skill at occlumency he wouldn't last a week in the dark lord's constant presence. His options seemed to be gradually drawing closer and closer to a horrid residence at Azkaban where his only company would be the taunts of the dementors as his magic and mind slowly melted away.

Oh how he loathed this, but unlike in the past when he would have blamed Potter or his mudblood for his pain now he knew beyond the shadow of a doubt that he only had himself to blame for being so gullible and so easily trained. He Draco Malfoy, the prince of Slytherin house, could now freely admit that every last bit of the drivel his father had force fed him from his first memories wasn't worth the dirt the man had been buried in.

With the equivalent to a mental sigh Draco understood that his options no matter how many he could think of would ultimately come

down to if Potter and Dumbledore would think him worthy of redemption. He never wanted to fight in this war, but he would if he could regain some sort of self respect and maybe the prayer that on the outside chance Ginny could see beyond his deception and believe that his feelings if nothing else were real. The problem was that he never had been one to pray, and he had a feeling that some karmic debt would need to be paid in full first.

Hospital Wing 7 pm

As Moody had asked of them, Harry and Hermione were watching Terry Boot's bed closely for any sign of the painful reversion process that accompanies the end of a polyjuice transformation.

Their spirits were slightly higher than earlier due to the good news that Susan's injuries were in no way life threatening and after some therapy to regain full use of her left side she would be as good as new. One of the few blessings of the day, at least if your name wasn't Lord Voldemort that is.

In their long stint of observing in the hospital wing a few other things became clear. First, classes would not be picking back up on Monday. Second, there would be some drastic changes to what constituted the security of the castle and Hogsmeade for the time between today and if they did return following the winter term. Third, who ever was impersonating Terry Boot had been the entire term, and this person had potentially given away several secret facts about Harry and the rest of the DA. Last, and perhaps most importantly was that Lord Voldemort was no longer playing by the same rules. This war truly was now a fight for survival against a creature willing to kill people regardless of the time or place.

If they had learned one thing from Dumbledore about Tom Riddle in the first war of terror; It was that the man while insanely evil and powerful still held traces of fear in what constituted his dark magic filled husk. Now, it seemed that coming back from the very edge of existence had removed some of those barriers separating what made Voldemort perhaps the greatest dark lord of all time. Death no longer struck fear into the being formerly known as Tom Riddle, simply because he had been as close to death as was possible and still managed to return thanks to the presence of his Horcruxes.

Harry had taken the opportunity to pull his fiance close and slowly run his hands through his slightly bushy but mostly tamed honey brown hair. Hermione's eyes were on Terry Boot's bed, as she would hum every few minutes from the feelings Harry's idle petting was giving her.

As the clock tower chimed half past seven the first signs of movement from the bed were seen as the Terry Boot imposter began to thrash in an unconscious struggle against his bonds. Hermione merely waved her wand and silently sent her doe patronus scampering out of the wing in search of Dumbledore as they had promised.

Harry rose from his perch on the side of Susan's bed and Hermione swiftly followed him as she quietly asked, "Full Body bind after you let down the stasis spell?"

Harry laughed lightly, "Why do you ask when you already know my answer?"

Hermione gave him a long-suffering sigh, "If you don't know by now, then you never will. It's definitely a pity that you don't know."

Harry gave her a bemused look, as he canceled the stasis charm and quickly replaced it with a full body bind. Turning back to her he asked, "What exactly should I know by now?"

Hermione smiled coyly as she batted her eyes flirtatiously, "You should know not to question me and agree with anything I say at this point."

Harry laughed very lightly, the laugh of someone looking to forget the horrors of the day and instead concentrate on something lighter. Hermione noticed but considering she was dealing with similar dark thoughts she only took his hand and twined their fingers together to wait for the rest of the cavalry to arrive.

## Headmaster's Office

"Minerva, have we received confirmation Owls from all of that victim's families for the memorial on Monday?" Dumbledore quietly asked his deputy as an informal meeting for the staff continued in the headmaster's office.

Hufflepuff house had been hit the hardest, as seven students from the fifth through seventh years were killed by Reapers. Surprising to no one was the fact that only a couple of Slytherins even attended the weekend, and of those not a scratch could be found amongst them.

Accordingly Professor Slughorn had been very silent during the meeting, even though no one held the man culpable for the actions of those under his ward. It was long ago accepted that the students of Slytherin house mainly wished for a war to exterminate those deemed less worthy of practicing magic.

McGonagall finally answered in the uncomfortable silence following Dumbledore's question, "Yes Albus, the final arrangements are being made as we speak."

The words hung in the air as each individual staff member felt the overwhelming weight of having failed those students that hadn't lived to see the things that made Hogwarts so special.

As Professor Sprout was about to speak she suddenly noticed the gaping hole that the injured Charms professor had left without his excitable and cheery demeanor. Silence again descended on the room only to be interrupted as a glorious bright white doe came charging into the office right through the wall.

Dumbledore merely smiled and said, "I dare say we won't have need of awkward silences the remainder of the night, I will discuss tonight's finding tomorrow morning in the great hall for breakfast."

Hospital Wing 8:30 pm

Twenty-five minutes had passed since the form of Draco Malfoy had reappeared inside of the walls of Hogwarts since his expulsion ten months earlier. It was a testament to how far Harry and Hermione had come in that time that no additional injuries had been incurred upon the pale skinned platinum haired wizard during this time.

After looking down at the petrified Slytherin Harry shook his head as he muttered, "Voldemort has a very bad sense of humor."

Hermione by the merest hint of margins managed to refrain from rolling her eyes as she bravely held back the remaining students who also wanted a piece of the last male Malfoy. Ginny hadn't needed the same restraint as she simply ran from the wing with tears falling down her cheeks at this latest betrayal and breaking of trust in her life.

Finally, Dumbledore led Amos Diggory, Moody, and a couple of men clad in auror blues into the wing and upon seeing Malfoy the headmaster's eyes took on a very calculating gleam. Fortunately, only Harry and Hermione caught the subtle change and decided to see where the old wizard thoughts would lead.

Harry released the binding spell as the two aurors gently propped Malfoy up on a pillow before canceling the silencio that Hermione had found necessary after listening to the indignant squawks coming from Malfoy at being supervised by Potter and his mudblood. At the time Hermione had wryly said, "Good to see that no matter how many things change something stay the same after all."

After one dripped a bit of a clear liquid down Malfoy's throat the other started keeping time until they all saw his pale eyes cloud over signifying the truth serum's success.

The taller auror began the questioning, "What is your full name?"

Draco replied unblinkingly in a flat monotone voice, "Draco Lucius Malfoy."

The auror merely nodded, setting up a series of simple questions led to more complex questions as a rule as an interrogator. After a few more questions about what house he was sorted into and what were his parents' names. The man took his first chance at defeating the conditioned responses Death eaters were synonymous for.

"Where is Terry Boot and what is his condition?"

Draco quietly replied, "The dark lord had Boot captured and impersonated for a time before I took the position at his request. He has been given the dementors kiss at some point and is kept alive in order to harvest polyjuice ingredients."

The interrogator glanced back at the others before Dumbledore stepped forward and asked, "Draco, why are you at Hogwarts impersonating the late Mr. Boot?"

Draco blinked once his eyes regaining clarity for a moment before they clouded again, "I was ordered to come to Hogwarts and find a means of killing Albus Dumbledore."

Dumbledore didn't blink, "Have you had any success?"

Draco softly replied, "I have refused the dark lord's wishes although he has no means of knowing this. I no longer follow the dark lord."

This statement caused more consternation amongst the group as Draco's eyes finally cleared and a resigned expression crossed his face.

Everyone save Dumbledore realized that while Draco Malfoy may be an arrogant and stupid little twit, his only crime was impersonating another under the guise of polyjuice potion. An offense punishable by six months of jail time at the most. His mere presence served as proof that the little ponce did not carry the mark. Only Snape amongst those that carried the mark could step foot on Hogwarts ground, and this was due to the headmaster's variation of Harry and Hermione's original deatheater ward.

Amos Diggory shared a look with Moody before they pulled Dumbledore aside and had a brief but tense conversation.

Thanks to their enhanced canine hearing Harry and Hermione picked up enough to know that Draco Malfoy's fate would rest in their hands.

Having seen enough in the past few months it was plain to see that Ginny had become attached to Terry in a way beyond mere dating. Sharing a brief mental conversation using their legilimency, it was decided that they would talk to Ginny in their own spare time and then confront Draco about where he actually lay in the war ahead.

After finishing up the deposition Draco was placed under a special stasis spell designed specifically for hospitalized criminals.

Dumbledore gathered Harry and Hermione and confirmed what they had overheard. "Due to the special relationship you both have with young Mr. Malfoy, it has been deemed that you two will determine his punishment when you return from the holiday season. Mr. Malfoy's shoulder will require a few weeks of healing and some rehabilitation that will be supervised by Madam Pomfrey and some aurors."

As Dumbledore left the hospital wing Harry and Hermione shared a look that clearly said, not only must Voldemort have a horrid sense of humor but fate must be playing a prank on them as well.

December 24th, London Grimmauld Place 3 pm

"Harry, get your lazy arse down here Moony and I have something we want to discuss with you!" Sirius screamed up the stairs of Grimmauld Place.

Harry groaned in his room, Hermione's arm around his middle tightened reflexively. Slowly and ever so carefully Harry pried himself from her warm embrace still feeling the effects from the late night activities he had engaged his fiancé in. Making the dutiful 'morning' march to the bathroom Harry waved his hand gently covering Hermione in the large duvet with a built in heating charm as she snuggled into the covers seeking out something to replace his warmth.

Harry pulled on a pair of pajama pants and a long sleeved shirt before he made his way downstairs to talk to his godfather.

Grumbling he spotted both Remus and Sirius in the den laughing and chatting about something, probably from their younger years.

"What did you want?" Harry grumbled.

Sirius glanced up and his expression turned solemn, "I was wondering if you'd like to talk about the attack on Hogsmeade a week ago. I know things have been rather crazy since then with the memorial and clean up duty at the ministry, and I just wanted you to know that both Moony and I are willing to listen if you have something to say."

Harry's expression hardened as he replied, "Thanks, but I think I'll be alright. Hermione has always been the best about getting me to work through this stuff." Harry didn't bother to see if the elder marauders had any further to say as he left the room quickly, not in the mood to discuss the matter any more.

Remus and Sirius shared a concerned glance; it had been a long running concern that the events of the war were going to harden both Harry and Hermione. Based upon Harry's reaction a moment earlier, they had assumed correctly.

Sirius sighed before his eyes lit up, "That's it Moony, if we can't help him deal, we can at least take his mind off of it for a bit. Where's that muggle tree lot you were telling me about?"

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Harry rubbed at his eyes tiredly as he walked back into his room, a small smile flickering on his face as he noticed Hermione was still sleeping. Carefully Harry climbed back into the bed, Hermione subconsciously seeking out his presence as she curled into his chest, a small content smile on her face.

As his eyes grew heavy with sleep his groggy mind noted the conversation with Remus and Sirius, he would clear the air with them when he woke up, and there was no reason to be harboring ill will this close to Christmas. As he drifted off he thought back to the memorial service a few days ago, it had been one of the most difficult things he had ever dealt with.

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One of the big negatives about life at Grimmauld Place was the mere presence of one Draco Malfoy, under house arrest by Albus Dumbledore until a time could be set aside for an interview of the pale haired teenager.

The Boot's had been informed that Terry had died tragically in a fire during the attack on Hogsmeade, considering the sensitivity of the truth of the young man's demise; it was a necessary evil of the war. So, after some heavy thinking by Dumbledore he requested Draco be placed under house arrest, and the ministry seemed amenable to the idea all things considered.

It had come as a stroke of genius when Harry gathered Dobby up and said, "Make sure Draco is treated better than you were treated when he was your master."

Draco had winced at that, anything short of torture would have been acceptable if that was the case, but fortunately the elf had simply treated him as a prisoner of war. Of course the light's interpretation of the P.O.W. was much preferable to the dark lord's approach of torture prisoners and then beat them into insanity.

Rico's Tree Lot, Outskirts of London 3:45 pm

"Remus pay the man, we have to get back so we actually have tonight to decorate the blasted thing. The Grangers will be at my place in less than an hour." Sirius muttered anxiously after nearly a half an hour picking through the remaining trees.

Remus sighed but pulled out his emergency billfold, the one he had for his sojourns into the muggle world as had become his custom of late. Fortunately, his years of finding work amongst the muggles allowed him to move seamlessly between the two worlds.

The stubby looking owner of the lot grunted, "Ten quid will cover ya for that beast guv."

Remus nodded and gave him the exact amount before they made a hasty exit, with Sirius inconspicuously casting a feather light charm on the reasonably large tree as they found the nearest alleyway to disappear from.

Hogwarts, 4 pm

Albus Dumbledore was outside on a blustery winter afternoon awaiting the appearance of the American branch of his family. The castle was completely barren aside from a few staff members with no familial connections, and he would have the next week to entertain the 26 coming and he had a feeling it would be a time he would never forget.

Suddenly the Knight Bus stopped at the edge of the wards for the school and he watched from a distance as people began to pile out. House elves immediately began grabbing luggage and returning to

the castle leaving the carriages the students typically used to bring the others to where he was now.

As the carriages approached he was filled with an anxiety of seeing several family members for the first time, or in the case of his younger brother the first time in over one hundred years. It filled one of the many empty places in his soul he had long ago felt would never be filled again after the death of his one love.

First out of the carriage was a regal looking elderly witch, her face warm and lined with evidence that she smiled a lot. Next out of the carriage was a long bearded man that could have passed for himself if not looking closely, his face also showed evidence of a happy life and his eyes literally shone when they set upon Albus. Throwing all pretenses aside the men and woman walked up to him quickly and pulled him into an awkward three person embrace.

Pulling away after a moment Marcus Dumbledore smiled and boomed in a deep voice he had inherited from his father, "Ah Albus, you have no idea how much my heart needed that. Is Abe around?"

Albus nodded with a small smile on his face before the elderly witch stepped in and spoke in a cultured southern accent, "While my husband's lack of manners can be excused away due to his excitement, I will gladly introduce myself. Delilah Dumbledore and it is a pleasure to finally meet my brother-in-law."

Albus smiled and addressed the congregated group, "Welcome fellow Dumbledore family members. As I am certain you have heard of Hogwarts in some capacity I will only ask that you keep your explorations to the castle and grounds. The staircases are constantly shifting, so keep this in mind and we shall have a safe and happy Christmas Holiday. I hope to get to know each and every one of you again."

He turned to Marcus, "Abe is working in his bar down at the village you passed while in the Knight Bus. He will be up to the castle later this evening, so we will have ample time to catch up for over a hundred years of missed experiences."

Marcus smiled and followed as his older brother lead the assorted group into the castle, while it had been many years since he had

been in his homeland a certain sense of rightness filled his very being.

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Remus and Sirius found themselves in the entrance hall of Grimmauld Place with a rather large Christmas tree and no exact place to spot it.

Remus sighed as he watched Sirius shrink the tree down, "Ok so we have a tree, but no place to put it Padfoot. I am open to any brilliant suggestion you might have."

Sirius rolled his eyes, "We'll put it in the same place we did last year, and it gives a good excuse to finally clean the parlor room out."

Remus nodded tiredly as he followed Sirius into the cluttered room, frowning he looked down and picked up a book, his frown disappeared when he read the title before the implications of it settled in, "Padfoot, why is there a copy of the Kama Sutra in here?"

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Harry blinked his eyes open as the distant sound of someone yelling could be heard echoing throughout Grimmauld Place. But it wasn't the sound that awoke him; instead it was a clever little hand on a particularly sensitive piece of his body.

Hermione huskily murmured, "Just relax Harry, and let me take care of you."

Harry nodded with a small smile playing on his lips as he watched Hermione crawl up his body and begin trailing kisses along his jaw line before capturing his lips in a passionate embrace. Soon enough she grasped him again, but this time she took the time to guide him to her entrance before she sunk down on him. She moaned pleasurable as she began to rock side to side and up and down. Harry thrust into her every couple of seconds and they both felt their release wash over them after a few minutes filled with pleasure filled gasps and grunts.

As they back in their post coital bliss Hermione murmured into Harry's chest, "We should get a shower Harry; we're both sweaty

and sticky. Also, I'd like to see mum and dad before dinner and if your watch is right they should be back."

Harry nodded as he rolled out of bed, taking care to slip his boxers on before he scooped Hermione up and marched into the shower enjoying her little squeal as he completed the movement; as much as he loved Hermione's parents he knew they could wait a little bit longer.

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David and Elizabeth Granger had spent most of the past year going from safe house to safe house, helping the Order when they could but finding that it wasn't very often. They were going to see there daughter for the first time since the summer, and now that they were back at Grimmauld Place it didn't seem as though it could happen soon enough.

David looked around impatiently before he glanced into the Parlor room as Remus and Sirius struggled with cleaning out the room to make space for the Christmas tree. Stifling a laugh he turned to his wife, "Well, I guess Harry and Hermione could be just about anywhere in this place. What do you say we wait until they come down here before we catch up?"

Elizabeth smiled and suggested, "Why don't we help Remus and Sirius get the parlor room cleaned up? That way we can stay busy while we wait for the guests of honor to arrive."

As they entered the room a crash resounded as Sirius was buried in a pile of books and Remus laughed mirthfully. Elizabeth reached down and plucked a book that was covering Sirius' face and sweetly asked, "Could you use a hand?"

Remus chortled as Sirius attempted to glare before he finally settled on taking Elizabeth's offered hand and getting to his feet as the books were scattered further. Elizabeth looked around before she asked, "Where do all of these books go?"

Remus softly replied, "They're for research assignments that various people have been working on for the Order. Unfortunately, we can't just return them back to the library."

Elizabeth nodded, "How about one of those house elves you and Harry employ. They might be able to muster some sort of storage bin for these until after the holidays are over."

Sirius groaned and looked at Remus, "Moony how could we forget Dobby and Winky?"

Remus merely shrugged, "Even as wizards, we often forget all of the resources at our disposal."

Elizabeth grinned, "Well witches and wizards usually don't have an ounce of logic from what I've gathered. So, I guess we can excuse it this time."

Sirius laughed dryly before he called out, "Winky!"

Downtown London, Percy Weasley's flat

Ginny Weasley was sitting in her older brother and legal guardian's flat, sullenly staring out the window at the dreary backdrop of an alley running along the apartment building they lived.

The feeling in her chest right now was a heavy and oppressive pain, which seemed to course through her tiny body. She had been a betrayer in the past, but she had never put much thought into the pain felt when on the other side of the ledger.

Terry and the love they shared... that had all been an illusion by Draco Malfoy the bastard ferret incarnate. It was the second time a Malfoy had completely destroyed her, and she didn't know if she had the strength to get up from this attack. She no longer had a large family to support her and aid her in recovery, and friends of true value like Harry and Hermione weren't as close as they once had been.

She only had herself to blame, she had everything in her hands at one time and her own vanity had ruined it all. Still for a 15 year old girl, she would hope that her life hadn't been completely ruined by making decisions she never should have.

Percy and Penny would be back soon enough, and she didn't want to ruin the little family support she still had by messing up their Christmas.

The sound of a door opening realized Ginny's worries as Penelope and Percy shared some whispered words before the muggleborn witch walked into the room.

"Ginny, sweetheart I think we need to talk about what happened." Penelope softly stated as she sat down next to the redhead on the couch facing the window.

Ginny sniffed once, her control of her emotions slipping as she asked, "What do you want me to say Penny?"

Penny wrapped an arm around the smaller girl and gently squeezed, "Tell me what you're feeling right now."

Ginny's lip quivered before she replied, "I feel betrayed that Terry was actually Draco the entire time. I feel angry at myself for not being smart or strong enough to realize that it wasn't the real Terry. I feel sad because I know what I felt for him, and now I understand that everything he did was a lie. I mean, yes he saved my life at Madam Puddifoot's and I think he was actually going to tell me who he was. But... I mean how can I ever know that?"

Penelope ran a hand through Ginny's flame red hair trying to calm the younger girl before she answered, "Sweets, you have to talk to him so you can move on from this. Once you're out of Hogwarts you can try dating again, and I'll help you little sister."

Ginny sniffed and then let out a small giggle, "I've always wanted an older sister."

Penelope merely smiled and kissed Ginny's the porcelain skin of her alabaster forehead, "I've always wanted a younger sister too. Once Percy and I get married we can make it official. But, you need to send an owl to Hogwarts and arrange a meeting with Draco Malfoy. You can only move on after you get some answers."

Ginny nodded as the pair of women idly watched snow fall down on an early winter evening in London.

She still felt remorse about her attempted unforgivable curse on Hermione all those months ago. Lonely and sad she eventually

closed her eyes in an attempt to ward off the grief she knew would come.

Grimmauld Place, London 6 pm

After a nice long leisurely shower Harry and Hermione dressed and prepared to join the other occupants of Grimmauld Place in some holiday traditions.

Hermione had a sated smile on her face as she squeezed Harry's arm tightly entering the parlor room to join the festivities. As though everyone realized it all at once the group turned and smiled at the young couple joining them.

Sirius bounced out of his seat by the fireplace and gave both a hug before he said, "We've almost finished decorating the tree you two. We left you the star at the top of the tree and a special ornament that Moony came across the other day while he was cleaning out an old storage room."

Harry grinned at his godfather before he said, "Sirius, I um I'm sorry about earlier and snapping at you."

Sirius waved it away, "I understand pup, and everyone gets irritable after seeing an attack like that one. But, have you and your lovely fiancé come to an understanding of sorts?"

Hermione simply glowed as she answered, "I think we have yes."

All of the adults laughed lightly at the obvious love shared between the teens, Hermione's parents were next in the hug line followed by Remus and Tonks.

Emmeline had simply been watching with a small smile on her face until she softly spoke, "This is what we're fighting for. Moments like these, remember these happy moments because they are a reminder of what we have to gain."

The light mood took on a slightly more solemn tone as everyone sobered before Sirius grabbed the last two decorations and held them behind his back.

Sirius grinned almost like a little child as he said, "Pick a hand Hermione, after all a true gentleman allows ladies choice."

Emmeline muttered, "Good thing you aren't a gentleman then."

Sirius stuck out his bottom lip as everyone else laughed before Hermione picked Sirius' right hand. Sirius' eyes were alight as he revealed an ornament which was obviously magical in origin.

He handed the ornament to Hermione for closer inspection and she gasped as a miniature version of James, Lily, and a teenaged Harry waved to her from what she surmised must have been Godric's Hollow.

Sirius wistfully said, "Lily was so talented at charms she gave these out to her closest friends as a perpetual Christmas card. If James and Lily had survived to have more children they would have been on the ornament also. As you can see, Lily rarely spared any expense to make you feel a part of her family."

Harry smiled softly as he listened to Sirius talk about his mother; Hermione gave him a chaste kiss on the lips before she wandlessly levitated the ornament to the tree, a built in sticking charm took care of the rest as a bare branch suddenly was inhabited by the Potter family.

Harry took the star from Sirius and brushed his lips over Hermione's ear as he whispered, "You'll be on that ornament when we take it out next year for decoration."

Hermione couldn't help the small shiver from the emotional overload that statement, full of promises evoked in her.

Outside of Atlanta Georgia, 1 pm local time (6 pm London time)

Perhaps the one nice thing about this time of year for Ron was that the guards all relaxed enough that he didn't need to look over his shoulder at every turn. He had been in this training for nearly seven months now, and he was beginning to see just how stupid and wrong his entire approach to life had been.

He had received enough news of what was happening back home to understand how the war was affecting the world, heck Bill had been killed and he never even thought to grieve for his oldest brother.

Family... how do you squander something so abstract yet important? However, it was possible Ron understood just how badly he had mucked things up. To a casual observer there might have been a time where some might have thought Harry and Hermione had been that close to him. Now in hindsight a part of him wondered if he had let them in a little bit. Third year at the very least, Ron would now allow that he would have given his life for Harry's in the Shrieking Shack.

Where had it gone wrong, had it all started when Harry's name came out of the goblet of fire? He no longer could suppress his baser urges and had lashed out, to no particular end other than the frustration of losing out to boy wonder again. The Yule Ball had simply been the final nail in the coffin of two friendships, and he knew that he burned all bridges by the end of his time in Britain. He would start over, but where would it be and could he overcome his mistakes of the past to do it?

Ron was so lost to his pensive mood that he never noticed Dave watching him with a thoughtful frown across the room.

Grimmauld Place 9 pm

"Come on Harry give us a song." Sirius slurred in such a way to leave no doubt about his relative sobriety to anyone else.

Harry chuckled at his godfather's antics before he turned to Emmeline, "Do keep your man under control, would you?"

Emmeline laughed softly, "Sirius is like a force of nature Harry, and if he wants to do something it takes something very big and very determined to stop him."

Harry pursed his lips in mock annoyance before he turned his attention back to the rest of the room. Remus, Tonks, and the elder Grangers were all dancing to a Christmas song playing on the WWN, a prospect which apparently was attractive to Hermione based upon her puppy dog eyes she was aiming at Harry.

Harry did a small bow and formally said, "Would my lady care for a dance?"

Hermione snorted as she took his hand and said, "That was so dorky, but yes I'd like to dance."

As Harry's hands came to rest on Hermione's hips, her hands found a home around his waist as they began to sway to the music. It was a ballad by Celestina Warbeck; the song was You Charmed the Heart Right Out of Me and the soothing tones it made. Harry couldn't suppress a smile at some of the sappy lyrics but he refrained from saying anything as Hermione turned her cheek into his chest and sighed contentedly.

When the song finally ended some ten minutes later, apparently the wizarding world believed in making songs very long, Hermione smiled and turned her head so that she was looking into Harry's eyes. With a vague hand gesture Hermione summoned mistletoe that had been floating across the room.

Pointing up with one of her hands Harry glanced and spotted the mistletoe before he released a low rumbling chuckle. Bending his neck their lips came together before the kiss deepened, for the moment they were simply a pair of teenagers in love the war ceased to exist and things were as they should have been.

Unplottable location, somewhere on the British Isles

The man once known as Tom Riddle winced as Potter's echo of a connection was sending some very distracting and painful thoughts his way. The time was running out until he would have to force the final confrontation. Dumbledore still stood and by all appearances the young Malfoy had been discovered, only one plot remained to remove Potter's most wily supporter.

While the mudblood might fight by Potter's side, the old wizard was the one watching their flank and that would prove to be a problem if he hoped to win the final confrontation. He could feel it every day, the way the power was shifting in the world.

As he ran an agitated hand through his still thick hair the door to his chamber slid open to reveal Bellatrix. Perhaps Potter wasn't the only one who would have a strong female at his side in the end; a book

of binding rituals came to mind, and for the first time in a very long time some of that power shifted back to Lord Voldemort's column.

A/N: Next chapter will lead to more changes in the storyline from the original, most namely overall acceleration in the Dumbledore plot and Voldemort picks up the pace considerably also.

Thanks to everyone that has stuck with the story and thanks for the reviews.

Disclaimer: It's JKR's not mine, I highly doubt anyone would make the mistake of thinking my drivel up to par with hers.

A/N: Sorry for the long wait again, but my time to write has been less plentiful as of late and frankly this chapter just hasn't wanted to be written. I'll be working this summer much more, so I'll try to get at least one update of the story out a month until the fall.

.....

December 24th, London Grimmauld Place 3 pm

"Harry, get your lazy arse down here Moony and I have something we want to discuss with you!" Sirius screamed up the stairs of Grimmauld Place.

Harry groaned in his room, Hermione's arm around his middle tightened reflexively. Slowly and ever so carefully Harry pried himself from her warm embrace still feeling the effects from the late night activities he had engaged his fiancé in. Making the dutiful 'morning' march to the bathroom Harry waved his hand gently covering Hermione in the large duvet with a built in heating charm as she snuggled into the covers seeking out something to replace his warmth.

Harry pulled on a pair of pajama pants and a long sleeved shirt before he made his way downstairs to talk to his godfather.

Grumbling he spotted both Remus and Sirius in the den laughing and chatting about something, probably from their younger years.

"What did you want?" Harry grumbled.

Sirius glanced up and his expression turned solemn, "I was wondering if you'd like to talk about the attack on Hogsmeade a week ago. I know things have been rather crazy since then with the memorial and clean up duty at the ministry, and I just wanted you to know that both Moony and I are willing to listen if you have something to say."

Harry's expression hardened as he replied, "Thanks, but I think I'll be alright. Hermione has always been the best about getting me to work through this stuff." Harry didn't bother to see if the elder

marauders had any further to say as he left the room quickly, not in the mood to discuss the matter any more.

Remus and Sirius shared a concerned glance; it had been a long running concern that the events of the war were going to harden both Harry and Hermione. Based upon Harry's reaction a moment earlier, they had assumed correctly.

Sirius sighed before his eyes lit up, "That's it Moony, if we can't help him deal, we can at least take his mind off of it for a bit. Where's that muggle tree lot you were telling me about?"

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Harry rubbed at his eyes tiredly as he walked back into his room, a small smile flickering on his face as he noticed Hermione was still sleeping. Carefully Harry climbed back into the bed, Hermione subconsciously seeking out his presence as she curled into his chest, a small content smile on her face.

As his eyes grew heavy with sleep his groggy mind noted the conversation with Remus and Sirius, he would clear the air with them when he woke up, and there was no reason to be harboring ill will this close to Christmas. As he drifted off he thought back to the memorial service a few days ago, it had been one of the most difficult things he had ever dealt with.

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One of the big negatives about life at Grimmauld Place was the mere presence of one Draco Malfoy, under house arrest by Albus Dumbledore until a time could be set aside for an interview of the pale haired teenager.

The Boot's had been informed that Terry had died tragically in a fire during the attack on Hogsmeade, considering the sensitivity of the truth of the young man's demise; it was a necessary evil of the war. So, after some heavy thinking by Dumbledore he requested Draco be placed under house arrest, and the ministry seemed amenable to the idea all things considered.

It had come as a stroke of genius when Harry gathered Dobby up and said, "Make sure Draco is treated better than you were treated when he was your master."

Draco had winced at that, anything short of torture would have been acceptable if that was the case, but fortunately the elf had simply treated him as a prisoner of war. Of course the light's interpretation of the P.O.W. was much preferable to the dark lord's approach of torture prisoners and then beat them into insanity.

Rico's Tree Lot, Outskirts of London 3:45 pm

"Remus pay the man, we have to get back so we actually have tonight to decorate the blasted thing. The Grangers will be at my place in less than an hour." Sirius muttered anxiously after nearly a half an hour picking through the remaining trees.

Remus sighed but pulled out his emergency billfold, the one he had for his sojourns into the muggle world as had become his custom of late. Fortunately, his years of finding work amongst the muggles allowed him to move seamlessly between the two worlds.

The stubby looking owner of the lot grunted, "Ten quid will cover ya for that beast guv."

Remus nodded and gave him the exact amount before they made a hasty exit, with Sirius inconspicuously casting a feather light charm on the reasonably large tree as they found the nearest alleyway to disappear from.

Hogwarts, 4 pm

Albus Dumbledore was outside on a blustery winter afternoon awaiting the appearance of the American branch of his family. The castle was completely barren aside from a few staff members with no familial connections, and he would have the next week to entertain the 26 coming and he had a feeling it would be a time he would never forget.

Suddenly the Knight Bus stopped at the edge of the wards for the school and he watched from a distance as people began to pile out. House elves immediately began grabbing luggage and returning to

the castle leaving the carriages the students typically used to bring the others to where he was now.

As the carriages approached he was filled with an anxiety of seeing several family members for the first time, or in the case of his younger brother the first time in over one hundred years. It filled one of the many empty places in his soul he had long ago felt would never be filled again after the death of his one love.

First out of the carriage was a regal looking elderly witch, her face warm and lined with evidence that she smiled a lot. Next out of the carriage was a long bearded man that could have passed for himself if not looking closely, his face also showed evidence of a happy life and his eyes literally shone when they set upon Albus. Throwing all pretenses aside the men and woman walked up to him quickly and pulled him into an awkward three person embrace.

Pulling away after a moment Marcus Dumbledore smiled and boomed in a deep voice he had inherited from his father, "Ah Albus, you have no idea how much my heart needed that. Is Abe around?"

Albus nodded with a small smile on his face before the elderly witch stepped in and spoke in a cultured southern accent, "While my husband's lack of manners can be excused away due to his excitement, I will gladly introduce myself. Delilah Dumbledore and it is a pleasure to finally meet my brother-in-law."

Albus smiled and addressed the congregated group, "Welcome fellow Dumbledore family members. As I am certain you have heard of Hogwarts in some capacity I will only ask that you keep your explorations to the castle and grounds. The staircases are constantly shifting, so keep this in mind and we shall have a safe and happy Christmas Holiday. I hope to get to know each and every one of you again."

He turned to Marcus, "Abe is working in his bar down at the village you passed while in the Knight Bus. He will be up to the castle later this evening, so we will have ample time to catch up for over a hundred years of missed experiences."

Marcus smiled and followed as his older brother lead the assorted group into the castle, while it had been many years since he had

been in his homeland a certain sense of rightness filled his very being.

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Remus and Sirius found themselves in the entrance hall of Grimmauld Place with a rather large Christmas tree and no exact place to spot it.

Remus sighed as he watched Sirius shrink the tree down, "Ok so we have a tree, but no place to put it Padfoot. I am open to any brilliant suggestion you might have."

Sirius rolled his eyes, "We'll put it in the same place we did last year, and it gives a good excuse to finally clean the parlor room out."

Remus nodded tiredly as he followed Sirius into the cluttered room, frowning he looked down and picked up a book, his frown disappeared when he read the title before the implications of it settled in, "Padfoot, why is there a copy of the Kama Sutra in here?"

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Harry blinked his eyes open as the distant sound of someone yelling could be heard echoing throughout Grimmauld Place. But it wasn't the sound that awoke him; instead it was a clever little hand on a particularly sensitive piece of his body.

Hermione huskily murmured, "Just relax Harry, and let me take care of you."

Harry nodded with a small smile playing on his lips as he watched Hermione crawl up his body and begin trailing kisses along his jaw line before capturing his lips in a passionate embrace. Soon enough she grasped him again, but this time she took the time to guide him to her entrance before she sunk down on him. She moaned pleasurable as she began to rock side to side and up and down. Harry thrust into her every couple of seconds and they both felt their release wash over them after a few minutes filled with pleasure filled gasps and grunts.

As they back in their post coital bliss Hermione murmured into Harry's chest, "We should get a shower Harry; we're both sweaty

and sticky. Also, I'd like to see mum and dad before dinner and if your watch is right they should be back."

Harry nodded as he rolled out of bed, taking care to slip his boxers on before he scooped Hermione up and marched into the shower enjoying her little squeal as he completed the movement; as much as he loved Hermione's parents he knew they could wait a little bit longer.

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David and Elizabeth Granger had spent most of the past year going from safe house to safe house, helping the Order when they could but finding that it wasn't very often. They were going to see there daughter for the first time since the summer, and now that they were back at Grimmauld Place it didn't seem as though it could happen soon enough.

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Unplottable location, somewhere on the British Isles

The man once known as Tom Riddle winced as Potter's echo of a connection was sending some very distracting and painful thoughts his way. The time was running out until he would have to force the final confrontation. Dumbledore still stood and by all appearances the young Malfoy had been discovered, only one plot remained to remove Potter's most wily supporter.

While the mudblood might fight by Potter's side, the old wizard was the one watching their flank and that would prove to be a problem if he hoped to win the final confrontation. He could feel it every day, the way the power was shifting in the world.

As he ran an agitated hand through his still thick hair the door to his chamber slid open to reveal Bellatrix. Perhaps Potter wasn't the only one who would have a strong female at his side in the end; a book of rituals came to mind, and for the first time in a very long time some of that power shifted back to Lord Voldemort.

A/N: My apologies but the ridiculous wait, but I hope you all liked the chapter. Next time around we have the second and last part of the

holidays including a visit with the Dumbledore clan at Hogwarts, more fun at Grimmauld...and some less than fun stuff with Draco.

Thanks to everyone that has stuck with the story and thanks for the reviews.

Disclaimer: It's JKR's not mine, and if that wasn't already apparent enough by my style of writing I said it here for you to confirm your original suspicions.

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Hogwarts, Albus Dumbledore's personal quarters December 25th, 1 pm

"It seems like we are living a completely different life from back then, doesn't it?" Marcus Dumbledore commented mildly as the three brothers Dumbledore had finally snuck away from the rest of the Dumbledore family to have the discussion over 100 years in the making.

Albus nodded sadly, "There aren't many days when I don't think on what I did and said back then Marcus. We all were too young and too bull-headed to really understand the consequences of what we were saying and doing to take it back at the time."

Aberforth, the only of the three brothers without a long flowing white beard snorted, "This is meant as no offense to you Marcus, but could you have seen me actually making a living in America back then?"

Marcus smiled lightly, his beard crinkling during the movement as he replied, "In hindsight, no I don't imagine you would have been able to handle the rigors of living in America. But you Albie, you would have been a great success if you had come over with me. We would have taken those Yankee and southern witches and wizards by storm. Heck by my third year there I was a professor at this school of magic and had been recruited to act as a freelance warlock by the American confederation. I went out west one year and met Native medicine men that taught me more about nature magic then I ever thought possible."

Albus' brow furrowed thoughtfully, "I researched spirit quests during the time before I was a professor here at Hogwarts. Is that how you finally managed to become an animagus?"

Marcus grinned and a moment later a very grey and worn looking wolf was occupying his seat. Albus chuckled and said, "That

certainly brings new meaning to the term grey wolf. Well done Marcus, I'm sure father would have approved wholeheartedly."

Marcus transformed back seamlessly as he watched his brothers shift into their animagus forms for a moment. After they had transformed back Marcus idly asked, "So Albie, how many of your present students have managed an animagus transformation?"

Albus smiled serenely, "While I can not take any of the credit for their accomplishment, I have two prized pupils that have managed the transformation. I believe a pair of coyotes, would qualify nicely."

Marcus grinned toothily, "Ah it must be Mr. Potter and his fiance Ms. Granger. Since we've regained contact they are the one subject you seem to bring up the most."

Albus took a sip from the 100-year-old scotch he had received as part of his twenty year anniversary of being named a Hogwarts Professor. Finally he hedged his answer, "I have made my share of mistakes in regards to Harry and Hermione; and yet I have finally begun to see that I am merely here to guide them in any way they see fit for me to do so. If there is one thing I do take pride in, it is that they found each other within the walls to my school. There aren't many days that go by that I don't thank the heavens that they have each other, because Harry could have taken a dark path in his life without her guidance. I failed Tom Riddle fifty years ago, I am determined not to make the same mistake twice over. The lengths he has gone to..."

Albus knocked back the rest of his scotch and had to suppress a shiver as he thought of the very twisted ways his formed pupil has used his considerable magic. Aberforth stepped in at this point, "So, Delilah is it?"

Marcus nodded, "She's the best thing that has ever happened to me. She has given me a family and a reason to wake up every morning for many years Abe. I like to think Papa would be happy that the Dumbledore name will continue to go on for many more generations."

Albus nodded sadly, although he had lost his own wife he had never put much thought into having children of his own. The time had never seemed right for it to happen, and in a way he was relieved

that his youngest brother had indeed passed the Dumbledore name into the next generations.

Marcus finished up his drink and nodded thoughtfully to himself before he said, "Speaking of my darling wife, I think it is time for me to round her up so we can retire for the night. I'll see you both tomorrow for Boxing Day."

Aberforth took the private Floo connection back to his tavern leaving Albus to work over how different his life might have been if he had chosen differently all of those years ago.

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Earlier that Day Grimmauld Place 7 am

"Harry, Hermione time to wake up and open your presents!" Emmeline called out from the base of the stairs, with all of the giddiness of a parent on their first Christmas.

Harry rolled over and found himself staring into the brown eyes of Hermione, which shone with amusement and fondness. As she brought a hand up to his hair she murmured, "You have the most adorable bed head ever."

Harry chuckled and pulled her tight to his chest, taking care to brush a few strands of her own wild hair from her head before pressing a soft kiss to her smooth forehead. Hermione sighed contentedly before she groaned, "You do realize that we have to get out of bed and get going this morning, don't you?"

Harry laughed and propped himself up on his elbow, bringing Hermione along with him as he wryly added, "Just think, we are sharing Christmas with Draco Malfoy of all people. Well, sharing Christmas might be a bit of a stretch, but we are in the same house as him."

Hermione nodded before she rolled out of his embrace and grabbed her morning robe and cinched it up as she sat on the edge of the bed. Harry grabbed a t-shirt and pajama pants and quickly pulled his clothes on before stepping into his bed slippers.

As the pair walked down the stairs they could hear Dobby whispering a few spells, and seeing as how house elves rarely if ever verbalized their magic they came upon the same conclusion at the same time muttering, "Malfoy."

The adults of the house were all settled into their little nooks around the tree as Sirius cheerily waved, "Oy, come over here you two. We have presents to open, and then a huge breakfast to eat!"

Harry grinned at his godfather's exuberance and commented, "You know, sometimes I wonder if you aren't a kid under all of that hair."

Sirius did nothing to add to his defense as he stuck his tongue out and conceded the point. Winky popped into the room with a tray full of hot cocoa and once everyone was served she popped away, no doubt to finish her work on the mega breakfast to come.

Remus stood and raised his mug in salute before he spoke, "This is the second straight Christmas where we've gotten together and celebrated as a family. We live in a dangerous world right now, and I am thankful for every one of these moments like this where we can all get together healthy and happy. For today only the war doesn't exist, so lets have a good day and enjoy the good company." Everyone nodded and with the toast the promise was made, a day free of the evils of war would be the goal of things.

Harry was selected as the Santa Claus for the morning's festivities and an hour later everyone was surrounded by a large pile of presents and equally large piles of wrapping paper.

Sirius was trying his hardest to solve a magically charmed Rubick's cube that he had received from Hermione as Remus was reverently stroking an ancient text Harry had found digging through some bins at a shop in Hogsmeade.

Sirius finally broke away from his new toy, that had been charmed to call out hints on the next move to make as he said, "You know, I think a trip across the continent would be a fun way to spend a six weeks or so this summer. After all, there is no better way to see the world than from the seat of a motorcycle."

Hermione looked intrigued, "How would we get to the continent? The Chunnel would work, wouldn't it?"

Sirius grinned and pondered, "Why not install some hover charms on your bike like the ones that are on mine? I need something to do anyways. Just think about how cool that would be. We could fly low over the channel disillusioned, and then it would be straight to land."

Emmeline looked a little green as she protested, "I would prefer we stick to the ground with the motor bike if at all possible Siri."

Sirius smiled sheepishly and conceded, "That's fine love, I'll check into a ferry or boat that allows motorcycles on. I'd like to get in some serious time in Mediterranean, I've heard some mighty interesting things about the magical population of Rome."

Harry and Hermione merely nodded as Sirius continued a little hesitantly, "I've been meaning to have this discussion with the two of you, and now seems as good of a time as any other."

Harry quirked a bemused eyebrow at his godfather before he queried, "Oh?"

Sirius sighed heavily before he broached, "Harry, how old were your grandparents when they had your father?"

Harry furrowed his brow and answered, "They were in their late thirties, I can't remember their exact ages from the family tree."

Sirius nodded slowly and continued, "Magical parents almost always have all of their children while in their twenties. Your grandparents were the exception to the rule, in fact James being conceived so late in their lives is almost unheard of in the magical world. There is a rather simple explanation for that, you see even though magical people have longer lives than their non magical counterparts, we actually have a slightly smaller window to reproduce."

Harry and Hermione both made to protest at the insinuation of the conversation but Sirius raised a placating hand, "I'm not suggesting you do anything right now, but I figured it was my duty to at least inform you of the reality of your situations. I mean you two act as adults in everything else, but this isn't something you would find in a book."

Hermione nodded thoughtfully and replied, "It is true that most magical families have children relatively young, but I guess I never thought much about it. I mean Mr. and Mrs. Weasley they had Ron and Ginny when they were in their late thirties, so I guess I never thought too much about it specifically."

Sirius chuckled, "Well some people are just good at having children, Molly and Arthur are one such couple."

Remus laughed, "It was a running joke for awhile after Molly had finally had a girl if they were just starting a second six of solely girls. Of course Molly didn't think the idea of birthing five more children was a good one, but she would have loved raising them. Fortunately, the ministry offers a subsidy to large families like the Weasleys or they never could have afforded the tuition to Hogwarts, even with Arthur's reduced rate as a ministry employee."

Hermione nodded, "As much bad as the ministry has done at Hogwarts, the school would have been either closed down, or made a breeding ground for the rich pampered purebloods like Malfoy if not for the ministerial funding."

Remus shrugged, "When I attended Hogwarts, I received a full tuition scholarship, but that was back when they had entrance exams. The highest entrance exam of any first year resulted in a scholarship, of course that fell out of favor when a pureblood went without winning for about twenty years."

Hermione pondered aloud, "I'm surprised Harry's mother didn't win."

Remus grinned slyly, "Well the entrance exams were skewed for purebloods to win, even if it didn't work that way. I'm sure Lily was close to me, but there are certain advantages to having two magical parents. Lily didn't need it anyways, your maternal grandparents were reasonably well off thanks to your grandfather's career as a cardiologist."

Harry grimaced slightly as another piece of the puzzle that was the mystery of his family slid into place with his mum's parents. Hermione picked up his discomfort and changed the topic, "So Sirius, how many flap jacks are you going for this morning?"

As Sirius exalted his own flap jack eating skills the awkward little moment was forgotten, Christmas morning was not a time for might-have-beens.

Grimmauld Place, Draco Malfoy's temporary guest room 7 am

Growing up a Malfoy, Draco was of the belief that he had everything he could ever want living in their large mansion and getting a new toy every day. Christmas was no exception to the rule, and although his mother and father didn't smile or laugh much they showed their love through the gifts they gave, or so he had always told himself.

So he found himself under house arrest, wand less and at the mercies of house elf he personally had enjoyed practicing hexes upon with his father's watchful gaze measuring every move. Now the little elf was showing him all of the compassion he had never shown it in turn. He heard their laughs and carols on Christmas morning, and it made him long to hear a similar laugh from Ginny. But like everything else in his life, he had ruined it by choosing what was expected of him as opposed to what he personally thought.

How Draco wished life came equipped with a device that would allow you to erase the bad decisions in your life and start over. Surely he couldn't be blamed for the decisions he had made at his father's beck and call, but that didn't have anything to do with the position he presently found himself in.

As music began to play down stairs Draco turned on his side and tried to smother the sound of happiness from the downstairs, he didn't need another reminder of what he had ruined any chance of sharing with the person he wanted to.

Ottery St. Catchpole, The Burrow 8 am

There was a time in the not so distant past when the burrow was a bustling and happy place on Christmas mornings. Those days had passed when the family had begin to splinter over actions in relation to Harry Potter and Hermione Granger.

Ron and Ginny had made such horribly disappointing decisions, and while Molly knew she had perhaps been a bit too indulgent with her youngest two children, but they had acted beyond any reasonable presumption on her own little dream of one big happy Weasley

family. It wasn't a horrible thing to think of her children settled down with Harry Potter the boy-who-lived, and Hermione Granger the brightest witch of her age. Ginny would have been in the spotlight when she could shine like the gem she had always been, and Ron would have a strong girl to push him to the heights he could reach if only properly motivated.

She and Arthur had done the best they could have given their circumstances, and she knew a more reasonable couple would have had fewer children, but she wouldn't give up any of her children in exchange for what would have been a slightly more comfortable life, disappointing decisions or not.

The twins had moved out months ago, and word from them still rolled in, but it was far too scarce for her tastes. Bill oh...poor sweet Bill he was dead long before he should have been and simply for the sake of satisfying a madman's quest for power. Charlie had taken Bill's death hard and had been silent for months, having returned to his work at the dragon reservation in Romania without his older brother and best friend around to guide him.

Percy, although he had at one time broken away from the family, now he sent a weekly letter detailing his life with Ginny and his soon to be bride Penelope. It was presently the one bright spot in her life, how Ginny was turning her life around and how Percy and Penny would be adding to the family soon enough. She had sent out her usual knit jumpers to all of her 'kids', even if she hadn't really talked to Harry or Hermione in nearly a year.

She was broken from the ache of her lonely thoughts as Arthur was unfurling a parchment for what appeared to be a long distance owl messenger. In her mind it immediately meant one of two things, either Ron or Charlie were sending holiday wishes. Suddenly things didn't seem quite as bad as they had a moment earlier.

Arthur read the letter slowly his brow furrowing but the rest of his face remained in deep concentration as he scrolled down the two foot long piece of parchment. Molly could take the suspense no longer as she blurted out, "Well, who is it from Arthur?"

Arthur gave her a slow smile and replied, "It's from Ron, it finally appears as though this training has taken a hold of him for the better."

Molly snatched the parchment from her husband and began to skim the letter taking the time to catch noteworthy segments of it.

Had it all and stuffed it up because I was greedy and stupid and just a bad person.

I love you and dad and I want you to know what happened wasn't either of your fault. I was an arrogant and self centered little git and nothing you would have done could have changed that. If you could write back and tell me how everything is going there I'd appreciate it.

Have a good Christmas and Love from,

Ron

Molly smiled softly at her husband and said, "Well, maybe we did manage to get through to him."

Arthur nodded as he looked over at the family clock that had various hands pointing in mortal peril, as they had been since Voldemort's return to power. Ron's was the only one not stuck at the place, and surprisingly enough it was firmly ensconced at "camp". The Weasleys had not had a good couple of years as a family, but maybe now things were going to turn around for them.

Unplottable Location 7 pm

The air surrounding Voldemort's lair was particularly cool today, and unlike most everywhere else in the British Isles there were no holiday celebrations taking place. Instead something entirely different was taking place; during the first war Voldemort and his followers would have revels where muggle women and children were brutalized in the name of the dark lord and his greatness. Tonight, on a day most viewed as sacred and holy they had pillaged a muggle orphanage with nearly forty five children and five staff members, incidentally all of whom were female.

Voldemort sat atop his throne dressed in his most regal robes, tonight would be a night when he would retake the destiny that Potter had stolen away from him. Bella was perched on an arm of the throne, nearly sitting in his lap looking particularly beautiful and deadly all in one breath. She had been promised by her master that

she would ascend to become nearly his equal tonight and she was prepared for it in all ways. She had long ago given Voldemort her body, mind and soul; this would be the final step where he formally acknowledged it.

As a few of the reapers were viciously raping a young woman who had been identified as the orphanage vice-director of operations Voldemort stood from his throne, feeling more confident in his own immortality and infallibility than he had in ages.

He was well aware his Horcruxes were gone, but a flaw in his grand plan of protecting them was to have all memories of their locations removed to prevent a skilled Legilimens from lifting off of his mind. Thusly, he was technically mortal and aware of the destruction of his soul pieces, but with no actual recourse on how to protect them. But he wouldn't die any conventional death, his long held excursions into the darkest of dark arts would guarantee that.

Dumbledore and Potter had seen him find the one horcrux location he had actually puzzled out and memories of Regulus' betrayal had forced that as much as anything else. After that he had expended his energies to finding the contents of the prophecy and that had led to the loss of nearly all of his forces while he tried to juggle that with his desire to wreak havoc and sow the seeds of hysteria.

Voldemort was broken from his thoughts as everything had stopped in the large room, specifically designed for revels and where he could also hold court with his most powerful supporters. He spoke in what could only be described as a menacing hiss, "Tonight my faithful I shall take the final step to guaranteeing my vision of a world free of the stain of muggles and any others who are not pure. I will reward my most faithful by joining with her in a soul bond that will grant her the limitless power I already possess. You have all been granted the right to watch this sacred event, do not tempt my gracious mood by distracting me."

Turning he gazed into Bella's eyes with a look that could only be described as possessive, "Bella, join me in the circle, I have modified the usual ritual for our benefit."

Pulling an ornate and beautiful emerald studded dagger from his robes he murmured in an almost tender voice, "You have shown me more loyalty than any other, and for your unfailing belief in my cause

I wish for you to be my companion and the right to strike down Potter's mudblood companion in our final confrontation. This blade is Slytherin's personal ritual dagger and the tool I have used to make myself the god I am know. Cut your palm with the dagger after I have and simply let our blood pool together as we clasp hands, verbal incantations will not be necessary as long as you wish a bond to form."

Bella nodded, beyond flabbergasted that her lord wished to take such a dramatic step but she answered the only way she knew possible, "I will follow you into the gates of hell master, a bond with you is a dream I never hoped to have come true. You have made me feel more alive than any other."

Voldemort merely nodded and cut his palm with a shallow slash of the blade before formally presenting it to her with a bowed head. Bella merely accepted the dagger and repeated the gesture before taking her bleeding hand and grasping her lord and master's within it. Their blood mixed for a moment before Bella felt an excruciating ripple of pain shoot through her very being for a long moment. Only years of hard learned pain management prevented her from screaming out as her soul joined the small remaining shard of the monster once known as Tom Marvolo Riddle.

Voldemort's handsome face was alit with malicious glee as he felt a surge of power travel down the echo of a connection he still shared with Potter. The damnable boy was about to learn some lessons about why one did no earn the moniker of dark lord lightly.

### Grimmauld Place

The adults of the house were frantic as Harry and Hermione had dropped to their knees in unison and screamed their throats hoarse in a matter of a minute before vomiting and passing out. A firecall had already been made to Hogwarts, and the minutes were tense as Emmeline and Elizabeth held each of the teens in their arms as they dabbed at their foreheads with wet washcloths. cooing things only a maternal female could.

Sirius and David looked lost as they turned to Remus and Tonks before the scion of the Black family brokenly asked, "What kind of evil could make them both so helpless?"

It was a question no one in the room had an answer for and that terrified them more than anything else had in a very long time.

## Hogwarts

Albus was gazing at the wards quizzically and with no small amount of dread as he began to puzzle out why their strength had dropped so very much in the past few minutes. The ward's respective strength had been boosted tremendously when Harry and Hermione had entered into their soul bond all of those months earlier, and now they had nearly dropped back to their original levels. While he was well aware that the blood of the heirs of the founders helped to strengthen the wards, the direct descendants most directly affected their relative efficacy. It would take the blood of an heir to drop the wards to the same degree...

Dumbledore dropped the tea cup he had been sipping from as the implications of the last thought had struck him he was leaning down to make an urgent firecall when Remus' head poked out and bellowed, "Albus we have big trouble here, Harry and Hermione have passed out. They appear fine but they are magically exhausted.

Dumbledore nodded sagely and opened his own connection as he prepared to make a trip, he still hadn't noticed the faint presence of a magical detector on the edge of his office. The war had taken a bad turn, and it would only get worse before it got better.

A/N: Well, the wait was much shorter this time, and I can safely say we are down to the last 4-5 chapters of this journey. I hope to have this finished before Deathly Hallows comes out, but my work schedule will dictate that as much as anything else.

A few of you had questions about the last chapter, I hope they were at least partially answered here.

Thanks to all of you that have stuck with this story and thanks for reviewing.

Hogwarts Infirmary, January 4th 8 am

Sirius had been witness to the immediate aftermath in Godric's Hollow fifteen years earlier, two of his best friends fallen due to the same evil creature that was responsible for his presence in a hospital wing of all places today.

The pain of watching Harry and Hermione so pale and lifeless in their shared hospital bed seemed to bring back those long repressed memories of seeing James sprawled bonelessly on the floor of the cottage at Godric's Hollow, or of Lily's terrified but determined expression permanently etched on her beautiful face. It was a necessary evil having returned to the cottage long after Hagrid had left with Harry that fateful night.

Madam Pomfrey had been perplexed when the two teenagers had been brought to her around midnight on Christmas, they had no outward signs of trauma or injury but their tremendous magical levels had nearly been depleted. In fact when they had been brought in, Madam Pomfrey had indicated their magical levels were more closely aligned to that of a squib than a witch or wizard, a fact that was quickly amending itself much to the relief of everyone.

While the trained mediwitch had no idea as to what the cause of the inexplicable magic loss was, one wizard certainly looked like he knew what was going on. Dumbledore had been coming around frequently, he wasn't always present simply because he was still entertaining his family in the castle and was dealing with the aftermath of Riddle's massacre in Diagon Alley.

But, as was always the case with the old wizard, he liked to keep certain secrets close to the vest and this one appeared to be no different.

Normally Sirius would have stormed after the older wizard, but he knew that if Dumbledore wasn't more concerned about the unconscious pair than he had shown then they would be fine in time. In the day and a half since the ordeal Harry and Hermione's magical levels were nearly halfway replenished, and truthfully they looked more rested in the bed than they had since Sirius first saw them in their fourth year outside of Hogsmeade.

If there was such a thing as a well timed coma then Sirius silently mused it was the two sixth year Gryffindors in front of him. Emmeline was equally perturbed by the mystery illness of Harry and Hermione, and while it still came as a slight surprise to Sirius seeing such a strong maternal response from the blonde haired witch elegant looking witch. While he desperately wanted to have a child of his own he was beginning to see that Harry could still carry on the Black name indirectly, and technically he could name one of his own children a Black given his Black-Potter status.

Hermione on the other hand had filled out the paperwork making her officially a Granger-Vance in the magical world. While the name would be subsumed when Harry and Hermione finally got married after graduation, it would be forever associated with two of the finest families in all of the Wizarding world, and technically it could be brought back as a surname should Harry or one of his ancestors decide to revive it.

Blinking he realized just how pointless his present train of thought was, but he also realized it kept him from thinking some of the darker thoughts that had saturated his consciousness for the week and a half.

Emmeline had apparently caught his brief look of consternation as she softly asked, "It's funny what you think of when in a hospital, isn't it love?"

Sirius sighed heavily, "I was thinking about how much of our future is invested in those two sleeping on the bed there."

Emmeline smiled and softly said, "From where I am standing, it's an investment well worth it."

Sirius nodded his agreement with a forlorn shake of his head, it was better to have hope in his life than none at all. He had learned that lesson from his many years at Azkaban, and even if things appeared bleak at the moment he would hold on to that hope. Little did he know one of the sleeping teenagers was being given hope in an entirely different form.

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Harry had been lingering in the space between consciousness and sleep for quite sometime, it was a warm place but he knew it wasn't where he was meant to be. He could feel Hermione's presence, but it was as though an entity was separating them. It wasn't a threatening separation, as least as far as he could tell, but he was still fighting to remain conscious enough to fight whatever it was if he needed to.

An amused sounding voice broke through the haze, "I assure you Mr. Potter, I mean you no harm."

The voice was familiar, almost disturbingly so as he tried to puzzle out where he knew it from. The voice chimed in again, "To spare you the effort I will tell you why my voice sounds so familiar to you."

Harry tried to focus on the voice, but he couldn't stop his mind going back to important times in his short life, or at least important moments in the past couple of years. Truly seeing Hermione as a girl, and a spectacular one at that kept cropping up into his consciousness like a kaleidoscope of memories.

Harry finally caught Hermione as she was preparing to enter the hospital wing. Harry gently squeezed Hermione's shoulder as she turned around with her long front teeth and tears running down her face.

Harry grabbed Hermione and pulled her into a slightly awkward hug as her teeth were pressed against his chest. Harry didn't care how it looked; he had to tell Hermione how he felt about her.

Harry broke the hug as he could no longer feel Hermione sobbing and looked her in the eyes and said, "I'm sorry Hermione, I shouldn't have let Malfoy get to me. As it was, the most important person to me got hurt, and it was because I couldn't control my temper."

Hermione's mouth curled into a small smile as her teeth prevented anything more before she said in a muffled voice, "Oh Harry, it's ok, I can understand how it would bother you."

Harry waited five more minutes before Hermione finally made her way down to the common room. As she appeared at the top of the stairwell Harry's jaw dropped. Hermione looked like a million galleons as she slowly made her way down to him, with a radiant

smile on her face. Her hair was no longer bushy, but instead it was straighter with a little curl in it and had been placed in an elegant bun behind her head as a few loose hairs framed her face. She was wearing an elegant but form fitting periwinkle blue dress that was made of some shiny material as she wore the largest smile Harry had ever seen her wear.

Finally, convinced he had waited long enough he began ascending to the surface with Hermione, and soon they reached the surface to a slightly startled but hysterical crowd. Hermione had broken out of her magically induced sleep upon reaching the surface, and immediately found Harry and clung to him as though her very existence depended upon it.

The memories continued for quite some time, and slowly Harry began to piece together where he remembered the voice from, it was the little voice in his head that was always offering suggestions.

Suddenly the voice laughed melodically, "I see you've caught on finally Mr. Potter. I have been called many things...there are those that simply view me as the current to a large stream that takes all things to their proper conclusion. While I appreciate the beauty of such a sentiment, I do make my share of mistakes...in fact that is why we are even talking now. I misjudged your circumstances horribly the first time through, and I gave you a second chance, with a little help of course."

Harry's mind was reeling...the first time through, what was he living now? While nothing else seemed appropriate his life had been simplified to one phrase...a Do-Over.

The voice sighed, "Spare me the melodramatics; they were so tiring the first time I watched you. You've been far more interesting this time around, and aside from some nudges at the beginning of our journey it has all been your doing."

Harry swallowed...hell he wasn't even certain he had a mouth at the moment, but he was rather certain he was swallowing or doing the equivalent mentally before he replied, "Ok, assuming you are really what you say you are; Then why are you telling me this now?"

Fate made an approving noise, "Excellent, it is good to see you are able to focus on the matter at hand finally. I haven't much time, but I

felt it was only fair to offer you one last piece of advice before you face Riddle."

Harry waited patiently for a few long moments before he finally broke, "Erm could you actually tell me, or were you planning on saving it for a later time?"

Fate laughed mirthfully, "Impatient little bugger aren't you Potter?"

Harry at this point was so far beyond his last nerve snapped back, "Apparently this is all a big joke to you, perhaps which is why you had to give me a second chance in the first place?"

Fate sobered up at this, Harry's words had hit close to home, and the Harry Potter thread of fate had been one of the bigger mistakes. Generally the fates didn't drive a human being beyond the breaking point if it could be avoided, but then again Harry Potter was made of tougher stuff and his breaking point was well beyond what most peoples was. But break he did, and that was exactly why he had been given a second chance in the first place. Harry Potter was one of fate's children, and fate had failed him in the worst way imaginable.

Finally Fate somberly replied, "I can't argue with the truth Mr. Potter, and it is true your second chance was because of a series of tragedies that made your ultimate victory meaningless. But alas, for every victory you have won, Riddle has countered in this time. While you have succeeded in making the immortal once again mortal, you have one last great test you must pass to truly defeat him. You must ask yourself, what is the most important thing that separates Potter from Riddle?"

Harry was about to reply when the sensation of something akin to apparition invaded his senses, as he was pulled back across the intangible threshold he had crossed sometime in his unconscious state.

As though thrust back into his link with Hermione a flood of concern swamped his senses far exceeding anything he had ever felt before.

Hermione's familiar voice wailed in his head, "I thought I had lost you."

Giving the mental equivalent of a hug to his beleaguered fiancé Harry soothed, "I had to see something, and you know I wouldn't leave you alone."

Gently he added, "It's me and you all the way old bean, so don't think you've got rid of me already."

Hermione relaxed and after a lot moment to compose herself she asked, "What did you have to see?"

Harry remained silent in contemplation about the best way to answer the question before he settled on, "Do you remember the general theory behind how time works?"

Hermione impatiently answered, "Harry, I used a time turner for 9 months a few years ago. So yes, I think I can remember how time works."

Harry laughed, "Well, I can see you aren't in the mood for my little speech then. To put it simply, fate told me that I was presently in the midst of a second chance of sorts, and that I needed to remember what made me different from Riddle in order to truly defeat him."

Hermione softly commented, "It must have been pretty horrible in order for you to be given a second chance."

Harry agreed, "I imagine I was probably about the only one left. But apparently I at least managed to take Voldemort out in that reality." Shuddering he quietly added, "But, I know it would have been worth it if you had survived."

Hermione was about to reply when the haze that had been holding them in this limbo began to lift, it was time to see what they had missed, and why exactly they had missed it.

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The war that had just been coined, The Riddle War had officially resulted in a tremendous loss for the side of the light. Unsurprisingly many in the Wizarding world began to wail and rage at the lack of either Harry Potter or Albus Dumbledore there to save the day.

Mathias Stern had been no exception to the losses, as he had been in Diagon Alley doing some post boxing day food shopping with his father when Voldemort and Bellatrix had hit the busy shopping district. He had dueled with some lesser deatheaters that had also come along and therefore couldn't help as he watched Bellatrix decapitate his father with what appeared to be a mere thought.

His father, the one who was about to join him for a wedding on his mother's side of the family in France, the one who would be leaving behind a family , the one that had always been the rock solid family man was now gone and never to return. Now, he a 16 year old wizard was the head of the family. He missed his mother, he missed the comforting presence of his father, and he missed being able to talk with Luna and the rest of his friends. In fact, all he felt aside from the numbness of pain and loneliness was a chill that seemed to go straight to his bones.

Revenge wasn't something he needed against Lestrange, but he did want the war to end. He knew his friends would be the ones to end it if anyone did; he made a vow to himself that he would help them win no matter the cost to himself. He didn't want any more of his friends to lose loved ones, and this was the only way he could help.

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Harry for once was completely alone, and it was by his choice this time. After hearing about Voldemort and Bella's attack, he had felt such anger and helplessness. He had heard a trucker describe a friend's tough luck in a suitably blunt manner on the road trip the previous summer. Sometimes you're the bug and sometimes you are the windshield.

The grounds at Hogwarts were still probably the safest place to be, at least aside from Grimmauld Place, and for a light colored coyote on the snow spattered grounds, it was rather effective camouflage. Being alone and in ones animal form was immensely cleansing, something Harry knew Sirius could attest to.

Harry wanted to rage and he wanted to destroy something, but in lieu of entering the room of requirement and bashing glass, this was the next best alternative. It was perhaps the one reason he loved playing Quidditch so much when he was younger, he could separate himself from everything and just focus on the snitch.

True, he was still Harry Potter to the spectators of the game but for those brief moments he no longer associated himself as such. That freedom, the freedom from unreal expectations following years of being told he was worthless and a burden...that shift was something he wasn't sure he would ever be accustomed to.

The earth smelled pungent, the odor of decaying matter was ripe in the air as he passed around Hagrid's hut, the distant growls of Fang the only sign that something had detected his presence.

To an outside observer, no one would have guessed that the scraggly looking dog with long ears was in fact arguably the most powerful wizard in the entire world. Harry flattened his ears at his own self deprecating thoughts, while he thought his animagus form was perfect, and while he was certain others would be disappointed in how plain it actually was he would never complain about it.

What would he need to do when he finally faced Voldemort for the last time? Fate had told him that he had something Riddle didn't, and while his heart told him it was his capacity for love. His rational mind had been having issues with how exactly his capacity to love could aid him in vanquishing the evil wizard that had tormented his existence.

A distant howl reminded him that tonight was a full moon, and he felt a pang at the separation from Remus and Sirius. The bonds formed on those few full moons they had spent together were very strong, and in their own way they had formed a small pack of dogs. While Harry and Hermione were the most powerful pair and would be magically the alpha male and female, their little band of marauding dogs really didn't have a hierarchy and if he had more time to ponder the random line of thought he might reason that is why he enjoyed those times so very much.

As he skirted the edges of the forbidden forest he smelled the not so distant telltale odors of the predators of the forest. His adrenaline rushed as his natural animal instincts began to tell him to turn around and not follow where his still human mind was leading him.

Fear had long ago left him as a constant companion, and while he still feared abstract ideals he didn't feel fear as the all encompassing thing it once had been for him.

He needed this, needed to avoid complacency, because he was quickly learning what it meant to be a warrior and how certain emotions needed to be ignored in times of war. But, that life affirming rush of feeling fear, well it needed to be embraced lest he lose that edge of being battle ready at the drop of a hat.

As he approached the centaur's camp a familiar baritone called out, "Changling wizard, we have awaited your visit for many moons. Follow me into our camp, we have much to discuss."

Harry shifted back into his human form and his wand slipped down from his arm holster into his hand and he followed the familiar centaur into the camp, for what he assumed would be a visit full of vague predictions and wordsmithing.

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The large group was in the middle of a large field, with the only sign of it being anything other than a stag party of some sort, the giant obelisk in the center of their ranks. It had been two hundred years since a full session of the Knights of Walpurgis had been called, and it was a happenstance of dire possibilities that forced this one.

A slender white haired wizard tapped a long white staff of the hard earth, the sound was magically amplified enough to bring an end to the several whispered conversations taking place.

"We have all sensed the shift of power, one that Riddle wishes to defy the fates with again. We all know what we must do, even if it distasteful to the majority. We will withdraw our support from Potter, and remain neutral; it is how we must proceed."

Numerous voices erupted at the pronouncement of the senior wizard's final ruling, while it wasn't an unprecedented move to withdraw support after the Knights of Walpurgis had offered aid; it was the first time that an offer to one of the golden children of fate had been rescinded. It would be a few months before the knights would realize the repercussions of their extreme caution.

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Luna Lovegood's face was tear streaked as she silently rocked back and forth following her tenth reading of Mathias' tear spattered owl about the death of his father. There was so much raw pain and anguish in the words of the short letter she had wanted to Floo directly over to his house and hug her boyfriend until Voldemort and his horror was long gone.

A brown barn owl oblivious to the grief stricken young girl's plight dropped an ornately designed piece of parchment, with several decorative runes covering it.

Eager for the distraction Luna tore the letter open, reading its contents once before it vanished. While the news was anything but good, the official declaration from the Knights of Walpurgis that they had withdrawn their offer of aid, it did give her something else to devote at least a small portion of her attention to.

If the knights had withdrawn their aid, well then something that was big and bad had happened to shift the tide of the war. The question that plagued her mind suddenly was, What did Tom Riddle do?

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"Harry Potter, it has been many moons since your last visit to our camp. Have the stars steered you well my young friend?" Bane asked in a warm tone, at least it was warm for a centaur.

Harry sighed, "There was once a time when I truly felt I had control of my life. It was right after Hagrid first told me I was a wizard, and for some strange reason I actually believed him. I felt so free for a short time, but then I found out what it meant to be me in the magical world and that freedom was gone again. Now, I have to wonder why I should even try, when my path is already sitting before me?"

Bane rebuffed Harry's statement gently, "Harry Potter, surely you do not believe that which you say. You have affected great change to this world already, and every bit of this change is due to the choices you have made."

Harry gazed up at the stars pondering the centaur's words; he had made the choices to place himself where he was, and while Voldemort had never given him a choice in the matter he knew in his

heart of hearts he would have dealt with the evil wizard in one manner or the other. But, like his vision of talking with fate, how much of his choice was actually his own? That was a thought he knew would bother him for a very long time.

Bane glanced back at the nearby village; he smiled inwardly at how Potter was obviously working his way through his own problems at the barest amount of prodding. The stars had indicated that the night was a time of great importance for the child of destiny and he hoped that his words would be all of the guidance the young one would need.

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For her part Hermione Granger was dealing with the successive blows dealt by Voldemort as she typically dealt with problems beyond her control, she compartmentalized them and then asked herself, How is Harry coping?

The inherent problem this time, well Harry had decided he needed to be alone for awhile and he had told no one where he was going. Now, their soul bound allowed her to know that he was safe, but feeling very pensive about something.

From the bits and pieces she had gathered about the attack on Diagon Alley, she had surmised what had knocked her and Harry out. Voldemort had tried to even the stakes by adding his own companion to offset when she and Harry had bonded. If the reports on Bella's actions alone were even remotely truthful, well it was obvious she was now an immensely powerful and incidentally homicidal witch.

It had taken Hermione nearly a year to grow accustomed to a reality where she would or even could stand by Harry's side as he faced Voldemort in the end.

Now with Bellatrix entering the picture she could do the simple math and understand the dynamic had shifted once again. Harry and Voldemort were once again equals and it would leave her facing off against Bellatrix while she watched Harry's back.

As she watched the full moon out of her window, she felt Harry's emotions calm and a sense of calm washed over the bond, soothing

her frayed nerves to an extent also. Something had just happened, and for some reason Hermione knew Harry would explain it when he got back. For some reason, one that she would never really know, a sense of confidence washed over her, and that told her all she needed to know.

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As Harry began to wander back from the Forbidden forest, feeling much better then when he had left, a calculating gleam entered his canine eyes. It was a look that unmistakably made him look far too human, and if there had been anyone there to actually see it, well they would have probably warily avoided the scruffy looking dog.

As the coyote transformed back into its human counterpart in the shadows of Hogwarts a calculating voice could be heard vowed, "We've come to the end now, and there's no turning back Riddle."

A/N: Well, it has been far too long since I've updated this story and I apologize for that, but in my defense I have been working on it for the majority of that time, just in very small chunks.

I hope this chapter adequately site up the final three chapters we have to traverse, there will be some...fast forwarding through preparations, and next chapter will be the last bit of normalcy for most of the group, at least what passes for normalcy for them now.

Thanks to everyone that has stuck with the story and I aim to finish it before the end of the summer.

Thanks for reading and reviewing, and I'll see you all on the other side of Deathly Hallows.

Disclaimer: It's JKR's not mine, and the way things are going that is never going to change.

A/N: Sorry for the long gap in updating, but this story will be finished before I update my other story, so hang with me for the next few weeks as I bring it all to a close.

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The world had been tilted on its axis following the revelations of Christmas and the smattering of attacks on the New Year holiday. Harry and Hermione had awoken and had immediately known the significance of everything that had happened. Voldemort had indeed become Harry's equal, by doing the one thing no one thought he would be capable or willing to do, he had placed his soul with Bella's in an all or nothing gamble to defeat Harry and his bondmate.

The first thing the Gryffindor pair had done was opt out of their classes, instead devoting their time to independent study; all the while Hermione was pushing Harry to continue their N.E.W.T level studies.

The entire castle began to feel like a rubber band stretched to its very end as the calendar shifted to February, and then March. Sadly no one could fight the inexplicable pull of destiny, and it would have its final showdown come hell via Riddle or high-water.

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March 3rd Room of Requirement 11 am

Harry felt the sweat bead and drip down his brow as he continued the repetitive pull ups in the room of requirement. Hermione was off working on some new experimental spells, which left him here to push the boundaries of his conditioning even further than they had been before. With so much on the line he didn't want something like being winded to determine his fate against Voldemort.

So focused on the task at hand he was, that he never heard the door to the room quietly open and admit Hermione and the headmaster talking animatedly about Arithmancy constructs in spell designs.

"I quite agree Miss Granger, but you mustn't forget to factor in how different the power quotient is for a witch or wizard of you or your fiancé's caliber." Dumbledore explained patiently

Hermione however was no longer listening to the headmaster as she took on Harry's glistening form in all of its respective glory. While Harry would never be a bodybuilder, his muscles were... amazingly defined and basically told anyone who ever got close enough to see the way he filled out clothes, that he was not someone to be trifled with. Hermione broke off her none too subtle ogling, feeling briefly mortified at doing something so carnal in front of Dumbledore, but the feeling quickly passed as she reassured herself into the conversation.

"That wasn't the point I was arguing Professor, I merely asked what the practical applications of the spell were for the average witch or wizard." Hermione replied reasonably.

The quiet discussion was eventually enough to pull Harry from the pull up bar as he dropped to the floor and grabbed a towel the room had provided to dab at his face as he walked over to his visitors.

Harry arched his eyebrow as he approached and asked, "So what's all of this about then?"

Hermione waved the question away and asked one of her own, "Could you put a shirt on, you're distracting me with all of your muscles love."

Harry wandlessly summoned a t-shirt and pulled it on before Hermione continued, "Thank you, now I was discussing some proximity spells that should be cast on the grounds with Professor Dumbledore in case of an attack by Voldemort's forces."

Harry nodded as the room supplied a cold glass of water before he took a deep drag from the glass and said, "I don't know enough about the lay out of the grounds in an actual battle simulation to make any judgments. We did some simulations on the grounds for the D.A. last year, but I doubt it would be the same, especially with the reapers' skill levels compared to the deatheaters."

Hermione frowned but nodded, "Yes I suppose you're right Harry." Turning to Dumbledore she added, "Professor, I think we should

look over the final preparations in case we think of something you might forget, but feel free to make something suitable on your own time."

Harry hid a small grin at his fiancé bossing the headmaster around, but Dumbledore himself seemed more amused than anything else. "I shall endeavor to not disappoint with my efforts Ms. Granger. But, for now I must excuse myself I have other matters to deal with."

As the door swing closed Hermione's eyes took on a wicked gleam as she wandlessly locked the room of requirement's one current entrance and huskily said, "You're all sweaty, I think it's time I washed you."

Harry merely smirked as he removed his t-shirt once again, alternative kinds of exercise never hurt, a little variety was good for most things.

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March 17th 6 pm

Everyone had found different ways of coping with the impending battle that would decide if Britain remained in the light, or was once again plunged into darkness.

While Harry and Hermione had resorted to redoubling their training for a duel with Voldemort and Bella that was sure to happen, their friends were still picking up the tatters of their lives in different ways.

For Mathias and Luna it involved some very slow healing, and for the male Ravenclaw that meant learning defensive spells that would indeed work against witches and wizards of Harry and Hermione's power levels.

Fortunately he had found spells that worked by nullifying the very magic around them, the problem was they came at a rather large cost in terms of magic expenditure. It wasn't the sheer power so much as the fact that they prevented your body from immediately replenishing the magic being used, much different from your standard protego shield to be sure.

While he had buried himself in learning these new and somewhat dangerous types of magic he had neglected Luna, even if that wasn't his wish to do so. She had after all been there for him after his dad's death, and he highly doubted he would have been of much use if not for her support during the following weeks.

Today he was once again buried in the back of the library searching for spells when Luna wandered to his spot and wordlessly sat down. Expressing himself had become much harder since his dad had died, but he figured he owed to Luna to try.

"I'm sorry Luna." Mathias stated in a soft but scratchy voice, which had more to do with disuse than the location.

Luna merely nodded before she reached over and took her hand in his. It wasn't a big step, but it was a necessary one.

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April 3rd Slytherin Common Room 7 pm

In the Dungeons at Hogwarts, things had gradually begun to spiral out of control for the two Slytherin members of the DA, in their attempts to keep the majority of their house at the very least neutral in the conflict ahead. The Durmstrang transfers had officially taken the house over by this time without the aid of the feisty Ginny Weasley to keep some of the fringe students on the straight and narrow.

The petite redheaded girl was merely an automaton these days, her eyes were dull and her entire demeanor was listless at best. She attended classes, handed in the homework, and even got decent grades, but her life seemed more like a preparation for the end than anything else. Letters from Percy and Penny would often be answered with short responses, and nothing of substance ever came out, which in many ways was exactly what had happened to Ginny Weasley. Having her heart broken by Draco Malfoy was not something she had ever counted on, and now that it had happened she often would look in the mirror as if trying to will some more life into her eyes.

Percy had been brazen enough to suggest she actually talk to Draco and meet some kind of accord, if for nothing else than to drag his

little sister out of this self destructive spiral she was trapped in. Of course Percy's suggestion was met with nothing, no fight, none of the spunk that Ginny would once have shown to such a suggestion.

As she blankly stared out from a corner chair in the common room, even the most malicious of the Slytherins really felt no need to torment the poor girl.

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April 15th Hogwarts 3 pm

"What I am about to show you will be surprising and difficult to understand. I shall endeavor to explain everything in detail once we enter the memory." Dumbledore calmly explained in his office on this sunny early spring day.

"Is this your memory or someone else's headmaster?" Hermione asked in a curious tone of voice.

Dumbledore grimaced, which was rather strange looking before he replied, "It is not my memory, but I was there Ms. Granger. For reasons which will become clear momentarily I ask that you forestall any further questions for the moment."

Hermione nodded, but her brow furrowed as she attempted to puzzle out what the headmaster was being so reticent about. Taking Harry's offered hand; they all dipped their heads into the memory and were pulled in, for an indeterminate amount of time.

The three visitors glanced around, the younger two surprised to find themselves in a large cathedral, with all the telltale signs of it being converted into some form of a wartime shelter.

Dumbledore looked very resigned as he explained, "This is the location of my final duel with Grindelwald. Here some disturbing truths about my past will be revealed. In order to reduce the magnitude of shock I will explain some background."

Steeling himself Dumbledore continued, "The memory I showed of my wife's death was not the first time I had met Octavius Grindelwald. In fact I was a close friend of Grindelwald's before the death of someone close to me forced me to end our friendship.

Octavius took my rejection very hard, and it forced him down the path of evil that you have all doubtlessly heard of in your history of magic classes."

Hermione frowned, "Grindelwald was always a blood purist from what I've read professor he came from a long line of radical blood purists, didn't he?"

Dumbledore sighed, "Indeed he did Ms. Granger, and while it pains me to admit it, there was a time when my beliefs were as such also."

Hermione's eyes went wide before some sort of understanding flashed into them, "When you said someone close to you died, you're referring to your sister, aren't you?"

Dumbledore nodded sadly as he continued to lead the two Gryffindor through the cathedral, "I was very single minded in my youth and it led to the neglect of my sister, and sadly it ended in her death. The specifics of my life are too painful to dwell on too fully, but needless to say I was responsible more for her death than I would ever care to admit. Marcus had already fled to America at this time, and I was the only real remaining option to be the man of the house, a responsibility I was not prepared for."

Dumbledore lifted a trembling hand to his face, before he sighed heavily, "Due to the nature of the dissolution of our friendship, Octavius changed dramatically and delved even deeper into the blood purist sentiment than he had been in his early years. He was not a man I knew by the time I had reached him in this cathedral. This memory is from a wizard, who caught the end of the duel, which I believe will be sufficient in terms of explanation. I obliterated the memory from my own mind immediately afterward, and this is the first time I will have experienced these events in over fifty years. You will recognize the other wizard, as a young and considerably less scarred Alastor Moody."

Sure enough as they walked through the final archway they came upon Moody standing a good distance away as a younger Dumbledore and Grindelwald traded curses at a remarkable speed.

The younger Dumbledore dodges a nasty look black curse and wandlessly disarmed his opponent with a flourish. The younger Moody whooped with this as Grindelwald's eyes widened in fear.

Like an avenging angel Dumbledore stalked his helpless prey, "I know of your inability to do wandless magics Octavius, and you would be foolish to fight me with the muggle gun you have hidden in your boot. Accept your end with some small measure of grace, and perhaps your next great adventure may begin more peacefully."

Grindelwald spat at Dumbledore's feet, bleeding slowly he muttered in an accented tone, "I vill be avenged Albus, my son vill carry on this blood feud and his son after him. They will not rest until you are buried, and answerable to your crimes as well."

Dumbledore shook his head, "Octavius, I apologize for how our friendship ended, but you never understood the pain my sister's death caused me. Lest we forget it was your wand that killed her, even if my actions were implicit in the end result."

Grindelwald was slowly slumping down to the ground as this all progressed, and it appeared as if he was resigning himself to his end fate. Dumbledore continued, "That being said, I will not honor you with a death by my wand. You shall die by the same measure which you aided those muggle monsters that executed millions of muggles and wizards alike." Reaching into a pocket of his robes he pulled a revolver out and cocked the pistol.

Grindelwald didn't say a word as Dumbledore unloaded the six shots into his head before vanishing the body with a flick of his wand. The young Moody ran forward at this point and this memory began to fade out. Harry and Hermione shared an indecipherable look before they were all ejected from the memory and placed back into the headmaster's office.

Dumbledore looked as drained as either Harry or Hermione had ever seen him as he sat down heavily in his seat behind his desk.

Steeping his fingers he stated heavily, "As you can well imagine, seeing this memory has opened some very old wounds for me."

Harry respectfully asked, "While I understand why you wanted to have the memory obliterated headmaster, why did we need to see it exactly?"

Dumbledore exhaled a deep breath before he replied, "I needed you to see how very little triumph you will find when you defeat Tom and

Mrs. Lestrange. There won't be any wondrous moments for a very long time after you remove your enemy. You must learn to lean heavily on each other, and those you call friends, and while I have no death wish I fear I shall not long survive this battle."

Harry and Hermione both gasped before the bushy haired witch said, "But, professor you can't."

Dumbledore regained some of the twinkle in his eyes as he benignly replied, "It is not my wish to die Ms. Granger, merely a matter of only being able to avoid the inevitable for so long. For the first time in many years I have hope for a very bright future, one that I need not be present for to occur."

With that they were dismissed from the headmaster's office, and they left the old wizard to ponder his own mortality a persistent train of thought of late.

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April 19th Outside of Atlanta, Georgia

Ron Weasley wiped his brow as he continued to dig the hole out in the middle of the very large and humid swamp. He had graduated to the camp's labor squad, which was considered the final step in the rehabilitation program.

News from the Isles was growing increasingly dark, news of Voldemort's spree through Diagon Alley had reached far, and magical governments of the world had all agreed that if the dark lord succeeded he would not spread his terror beyond the borders of Britain.

Ron thought back to his life in Britain, the few moments of carefree joy he had with Harry before everything started to go bad. He felt no real guilt for using Hermione as a friend; after all she was only a mudblood. But, he did realize trying to force her into sex was a wrong thing to do and he wouldn't try anything similar in the future.

As he continued to dig the drainage ditch he sighed, there was no use crying over spilled milk now, he had ended that part of his life, and maybe it was time to start over here in the states.

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Ok Folks this is where I've been stuck these past three years and so I admit defeat, however I shall leave you with my general outline of how this one was to end.

Dumbledore does die when Grindelwald's brood ambush him, but he takes all of them with him.

Harry and Hermione have an epic battle with Voldemort and Bella as the other light side members duke it out with the followers.

Harry and Hermione vanquish the evil doers and while some of their friends have been injured none die, although all of them are scarred from the experience.

Fate gives Harry a final boost as the Potter family recovers from near extinction as Harry lives to help send his great-great-great-great grandson named after the family patriarch to Hogwarts at the ripe old age of 200 with his wife Hermione before they go home and pass on to the next great adventure.

I apologize to all of you that I didn't manage to put these generalized thoughts to type, but I did want to give you this much so your imaginations could fill in all of the gaps, and to provide some closure to my first real literary project of this scale. Thanks for reading, and happy holidays.